

Mayor's State of the City - 2016

Welcome to Meridian's State of the City!

Meridian is about our people - a community that unabashedly locks arms and focuses on 'Building Meridian Together'. Meridian is a special place we are all proud to live in. I saw that this fall as I knocked on your doors - pride of where you live, excitement about the many amenities we have gained, comforted by the feeling of safety, appreciation of the friendliness of our people and our 'small town feel'. A place people love to call home!

I am sure many of you thought I would come running out here - cheering "we are number one, we are number one!" However, I don't need to...the ones that live here or work here, already know that -- shhhhh, it's our secret!

I want to thank you all for joining us at this annual event! Thank you to our City Council. We closed an important chapter this December when two of our members retired from Council. Between them, they had 37 combined years of service on Planning & Zoning and City Council. We thank our former Councilmen Charlie Rountree and David Zaremba for their dedication!

We have a fairly new City Council; between them - excluding Councilman Bird's 18 years - have eight years of service in total. What they might not have in public service, they do bring loads of passion and ideas. I'm excited for the years ahead!

I want to thank our regional partners - cities and countywide officials. The collaboration in this Valley is enviable to many in our state. We work together on sometimes very weighty topics – and on rare occasions, don't agree. We have learned though that we can not let isolated conflicts bleed over into other areas that we work well together on.

I appreciate our business community - our partners in building our economy, our jobs, our prosperity. We are working together on industry clusters, on community amenities, and on growing family wage jobs. The city doesn't create jobs, our businesses do; however, we all have our roles and the city's is critical to the environment of business growth. We are your partner!

We need to recognize our citizens and volunteers. You challenge us to stretch ourselves, to better ourselves. You provide feedback - without this we would not know how we can do better. You are the eyes on our streets - many of our citizens are partners in keeping our city safe – we can't do this alone. Our volunteers (of all ages!) give countless hours - on commissions, committees or events, working as greeters or ambassadors, and more – all working on behalf of our community to BE number one!

To the City's Leadership Team and our employees: You make us proud. I am honored to work with these dedicated public employees. They not only work hard to provide Meridian's CARE values of: customer service, accountability, respect, and excellence -- they take pride in it.

And, my family! I must say I couldn't serve Meridian without my amazing family's love and support...they even knock on doors with me! Thank you~

I am excited to share with you today - what we have been doing over the last year and where we are going - as we continue to work, build, and grow as a community.

Yes -- Meridian IS full of surprises!

The one thing that is certain - is that we are, and constantly have been - a community that works together. And isn't that the 'recipe' for a strong city.

And it is a strong one; recognized nationally as the number one place to live in America! We've known this -- and now the nation does too. However, we should never stop trying to be even better. We do this by working together!

Over the next 35 minutes I will give a couple of examples, in each of our five strategic focus areas, of what we have done and our focus for the year ahead.

Strategic focus area #1, Strategic Growth.

The Parks & Recreation Master Plan was an important focus this last year - planning for the next ten years to provide a framework for future projects. Our team gathered valuable public input identifying the highest priorities. The master plan also included concepts for several future parks; one of those is 77-acres of parkland in South Meridian. We just awarded the contract for the next step - designing this park. While it will take a number of years to fully develop, our residents in South Meridian are excited for this project.

Part of growing strategically for our Public Works team is not just about water and sewer lines; it includes planning for future regulatory changes. Since the EPA last issued our permit in 1999, regulatory requirements have changed significantly - nearly quadrupling required laboratory testing and has 'limits and requirements' in the parts per trillion. Our Public Works employees have been working with multiple departments and third parties to receive our new permit. Initial estimates of these unfunded mandates were upwards of \$110M to meet new permit requirements. However, by narrowing the scope and financing strategies, this team has been able to reduce the cost by over \$27M!

Strategic growth means working with community partners like our transportation agencies. We have had a number of significant transportation projects, but let me highlight the completion of the Meridian Interchange! Hurrah!!!

We now have a formal entryway into our community. Recently one of our residents gave huge kudos to the work done on this project in keeping traffic flowing during construction – in her words 'seamlessly'. Today drivers feel 'welcomed' as they arrive in our city – and I know the

drivers that continue on I84 appreciate the removal of the bottleneck. Our thanks to the Idaho Transportation Department -- and the team that worked to get this project! A great example of 'building Meridian together'.

ITD Board Chairman Jerry Whitehead asked during the ribbon cutting – what's the next priority for Meridian? Thank you for asking, Mr. Chairman, it's the Chinden-20/26 expansion project. This needed capacity improvement will: reduce congestion, improve safety, and create economic opportunity. We have pulled together a work group serious to have 'One Voice' focused on improving this corridor and bringing it up to its full potential. Our call to action is for ITD to program funds to design and construct additional travel lanes and widen intersections starting at Eagle Road and working west. We have growing interest by community partners, ACHD, our county and neighboring cities. Soon you can get updates on our efforts via Facebook and Nextdoor! All aboard!!!

Working strategically with our School District is critical as their '385 square mile' large district continues to grow. Meridian comprises around 44% of the student population; however we must work together as 100% of the solution for adequate facilities for our students. We have convened a group to research what others are doing and how they are paying for their schools. It is the State's constitutional mandate to provide for a general, uniform, and thorough public education. Our citizens have bond fatigue filling the state's funding gap for operations and facilities with property taxes! Our School District needs better tools to pay for growth. We are committed to work with the State and school district to ensure quality education. There is work to do.

Strategic focus area #2, Economic Vibrancy.

Our economic audit – the Pegasus report - brought a defined focus to our Downtown. Last year I talked about a focus on entrepreneurs. The New Ventures Lab opened in the old City Hall in May. This has become home to 7 companies and 33 employees – and growing. They held 30 events including the first-ever Startup Weekend. The Lab provides a place, people, and resources for entrepreneurs to grow -- turning ideas into businesses.

Just across the parking lot, through partnerships between the Meridian Library District and the Meridian Development Corporation – the Library opened UnBound; a makers space. Meridian citizens have access to emerging technology from 3D printing to robots – or using the library's collection of hardware and software.

The synergy between the Ventures Lab & UnBound is unbelievable! Entrepreneurs can prototype a product on the 3D printer or CNC machine, design marketing materials using the media lab, access resources for their market research, or build client lists with their databases.

This equates to Success! Rick at New Ventures Lab was mentoring a student struggling with her business idea of creating a butter stick spreader (company name is Spreadrite). He referred her

to UnBound where they worked with her to design and build her idea – she won her competition.

Other examples had a business working on a KickStarter campaign design and print a card holder for a new kids game – and, a local bee rescue group created a functional small-scale beehive to educate students about bees. There is great energy in our downtown!

Our ‘Economic Vibrancy’ is emphasized with continued business growth across the city – one of the primary reasons cited by 24/7 Wall St. that placed us as the number one place to live. Commercial permits were up 25% and new construction investment was over \$400M.

The Village at Meridian continues to be a smashing success! They opened 17 new businesses totaling over 98K square feet of retail and office. In 2015, they signed leases for Mass Mutual, who just opened in their offices – Monday – bringing over 50 employees; and in March, Mark Monitor will add 250 employees, growing to over 300 this next year.

Business growth has brought weekly ribbon cuttings. The Meridian Chamber Ambassadors and Ken in my office have become professionals at them! We are excited that IdaPine bought the old Plum Creek facility off Meridian Road. They are new to the area bringing a \$16M investment and advanced technology that will be used as a showcase throughout the US. And we’ve welcomed URS, now known as AECOM; they are ‘new to Meridian’ but have been a respected company in Boise for decades.

We are equally excited about the businesses here in Meridian, that have expanded - one of these, Scentsy. Scentsy moved into its \$88M headquarters in 2013. The 73-acre property is currently undergoing another \$10M expansion to accommodate the distribution of their recently added skin care products.

We appreciate these expanding companies – and, we celebrate their continued success! With this business growth it’s hard not to feel optimistic about our future.

2016 looks to continue the excitement of ‘placemaking’ and business attraction. A grant received last year by the Ada County Realtors introduced us to 'lighter, quicker, cheaper' ideas for our downtown. One idea, led by downtown advocate businessman Marty Schindler, is to focus on a one block area of Idaho Avenue to extend the sidewalks into the street. Creating a place where people can interact and experience Idaho Avenue. This project will be presented to Council on Feb. 9th with an intended launch in May.

Idaho Avenue has yet another exciting improvement. Josh Evarts purchased the historic Meridian Exchange Bank, later known as Elite Cleaners. He is restoring this 110-year-old building into an art gallery experience, naming it ‘The Vault’. This will offer boutique event space and an area to grow Meridian’s fine arts culture. Josh owns another historic landmark, the Heritage Building on Main & Idaho Ave.; which opened PreFunk this last year – adding a new vibe in our downtown.

Our Health Science and Technology corridor – The Core – with the opening of the Idaho State University AP Lab and BioSkills Learning Center, is an economic magnet bringing jobs and research to this corridor. A hospitality grant - received by the Chamber in partnership with the City – will promote the lab targeting out-of-the-area physicians to use this facility to develop their ideas.

Lastly, the Ten Mile region is prime for employment opportunities. The city commissioned Phil Kushlan last year to evaluate this area specifically for an Economic Development Urban Renewal District. This is one of the few tools available to cities to create family-wage jobs and attract employers using state incentive programs and will serve as local match. Qualifying projects would have specific criteria and short timelines – with a ‘get it done and retire the district’. There are several exciting projects awaiting this tool. We are serious about bringing family wage jobs closer to where people live. City Council will discuss this Feb. 9th.

Moving to strategic area #3, Responsive Government.

An important ingredient to being a responsive city is staying connected with our citizens. We do this in a number of ways including ‘listening tours’ that I host at my home. I want to focus though on two specific groups – the Mayor's Youth Advisory Council and the Mayor's Senior Advisory Board – they are making significant impacts on behalf of their peers. They are busy ‘building Meridian’ each in their own way, but also together!

When you want something done – these are the groups to call on!

Our City Clerk's Office, responsive to frequent questions by our businesses, implemented a change in special licensing applications. The goal was to cut costs and increase efficiency - resulting in a 66% time savings to get these special licenses. Next, we will look to pass our staff time savings on to you in reduced fees.

As I wrap up ‘responsive government’ I have been torn on if this was an appropriate place to discuss a rare occasion we don't agree with the county. It's serious, it's looming, and if it goes a direction other than our desired outcome – it will impact Meridian and Garden City taxpayers unfairly. We have been ‘ordered’ to add a courtroom in each of our cities because of an old 1994 order; that was discovered in 2008. This order should have been considered ‘satisfied’ in 1996 when Ada County voters decided it would be beneficial for one centralized courthouse. The new consolidated courthouse opened in 2002 on Front in Boise, paid for by all taxpayers in Ada County.

Our hope is the Commissioners will join us – Garden City and Meridian - during the required ‘whether and how’ due process hearing in front of 11 District judges later this spring. We would like to stand in agreement that the ‘94 order was satisfied with the consolidated facility. We can then come together as the six cities and county to ask the legislature to increase court fees that haven't changed since the 70's to pay for our courts. Taxpayers – whether in cities or

unincorporated areas - already pay for courts through their county taxes. If funding isn't adequate to cover costs, this is a countywide issue and all citizens should pay equally to cover the costs.

Next, we have Strategic area #4, Safe, Healthy and Secure.

Our Meridian Police Department continues to look for more ways to keep our community one of the safest. This last year the department deployed 75 body-worn cameras on all of its uniformed patrol officers. Our IT Department created a plan for data storage and the Legal Department crafted the policy. These efforts support the focus on public safety, accountability and transparency, while keeping costs in check.

Our Fire Department added the bike medic program for a quicker response during big events – knowing every second counts. This program – made possible through a grant from Firehouse Subs – is a 'first of its kind in Idaho' and was kicked off at the Meridian Winter Lights Parade. Bikes are staffed by a Paramedic, and equipped with medical equipment including an AED; adding to our 'Heartsafe Meridian' efforts.

We're not only watching out for your safety, but also your health and security. That's why the City, with the help of many partners, launched DO THE RIGHT on April 8, 2015. The goal was to encourage people of all ages to do something nice for the person to their right.

This daylong event, to start a movement of compassion, was so well received by our community that we intend to make it an annual event – one that will hopefully grow beyond Meridian! KTVB has stepped up as a media sponsor so we know it will be. So mark your calendars for April 8, 2016 and #DoTheRight!

As we look forward in Safe, Healthy, and Secure our Fire Department has expanded its focus on delivering the service our citizens expect with greater efficiency. They are partnering with four other fire departments to develop a plan that will align future station locations to maximize a joint response and eliminate redundancy. As well, identify areas of future collaboration or even consolidation of certain services. This type of planning is a new way of thinking; one, we believe our taxpayers are asking us to do.

You might have noticed some information as you arrived about the Youth Farmers Market. This one-of-it's-kind market will answer a long-desired request for a farmer's market in our community. This not only reflects the community's priority on our youth: it gives our youth an opportunity to turn a 'hobby' growing healthy produce, into a business. Seventy-five percent of all vendors will be school-aged. The market will run every Saturday from Dairy Days to September. Support our youth by supporting this market. P.S. We are looking for young vendors too!

Our 5th and last Strategic area is Arts, Culture and Recreation.

From public art to public amenities there is truly something for everyone. Last year brought traffic box art wraps showcasing 'youth' talent on Main Street and art from artists of all ages in other locations. These art wraps bring community pride and beautification to these functional-but-unsightly traffic boxes.

Whether you are sporting a racket – tennis or pickleball – the new tennis courts at Settlers Park have been a big hit. But I think the biggest hit of all has been for our four-legged friends and their owners with the opening of the Storey Bark Park. Among its most popular amenities are a collection of agility items donated by Intermountain Pet Hospital. This park has received the 2015 Outstanding Facility & Parks Award from the Idaho Recreation and Park Association.

Indoor sports space continues to be a big challenge. We all are eagerly awaiting the opening of the Boys & Girls Club gymnasium and teen center which will be completed by the end of March. A community-funded project that will be a blessing and a valued partnership between the Club and the City!

Additional indoor playing space has been a topic of discussion with the YMCA allowing a potential win-win for all. We are hopeful to announce a plan moving forward in the weeks ahead that would not only address sports courts but a multitude of benefits for all citizens in Meridian and the surrounding area.

I am honored to share an exciting expansion soon to happen at Roaring Springs. They ranked the 8th best waterpark in the US by Trip Advisor and keep getting better! They are starting construction on a new 'Indoor Adventure Park at Wahooz". From amusement rides to a ropes course; the 4-story, 17K sf addition will open in November.

Pathways continue to be a top community priority as we work to connect the pieces from Locust Grove to Ten Mile along the Five Mile Creek Pathway. The 'rail with trail' continues to be a focus as well. I am thrilled to note that ACHD is stepping up to help lead this effort! These are important and critical projects connecting our community.

We will stay focused on these five strategic focus areas - important to our citizens and in delivering our goal of a premiere place to live, work, and raise your family! We love working alongside you in 'Building Meridian Together'.

As we look at building community – we look to those that understand the commitment, discipline, and investment necessary to building a nationally recognized community...or business. Our Legacy Award winners know how to work hard and get results.

This years award winners shaped a company that began in an ocean shipping container on a family farm in Meridian - into not just an Idaho success story, but an international one! That type of success requires vision, leadership and innovation. Our Legacy Award winners have this all and then some.

Their company is a vital contributor to Meridian's economic growth, but just as important our growth as a community. They are well known for their giving back and have worked to cultivate an atmosphere of kindness through philanthropic support of individuals and community-based causes through events, such as their annual Rock-A-Thon. Our legacy award winners are humble, and in spite of their success manage to keep faith and family a priority. They have been recognized nationally – but hometown is important. When hearing of this legacy recognition our winners rearranged their travel schedules to be here today. Join me in recognizing, and thanking, our Legacy Award winners – Orville and Heidi Thompson.

The State of our City is...number one! This is defined and made possible by the great people in our community and our businesses. We will have road bumps along the way, but we are 'armed' with solution-oriented youth, citizens, and business unafraid of rolling up their sleeves to 'be the change they want to see' in facing challenges head on! Indeed, we are building Meridian together.

Thank you for your vote of confidence last fall, granting me another four years of service to this great community! I am honored to serve with you and focused on continuing to be that number one city we are all proud of....but, shhhh, don't tell anyone!