

# MERIDIAN RISING

*CULTIVATING A NEW FUTURE*



**A FIVE YEAR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR  
THE CITY OF MERIDIAN  
JUNE 2014**

**Presented by  
Pegasus Planning and Development  
and Point A Consulting**



# Acknowledgements

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## **CLIENT**

### **CITY OF MERIDIAN**

Mayor Tammy DeWeerd  
Community Development Department  
Public Works  
City Finance Department

As well the helpful guidance and input from....

### **THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

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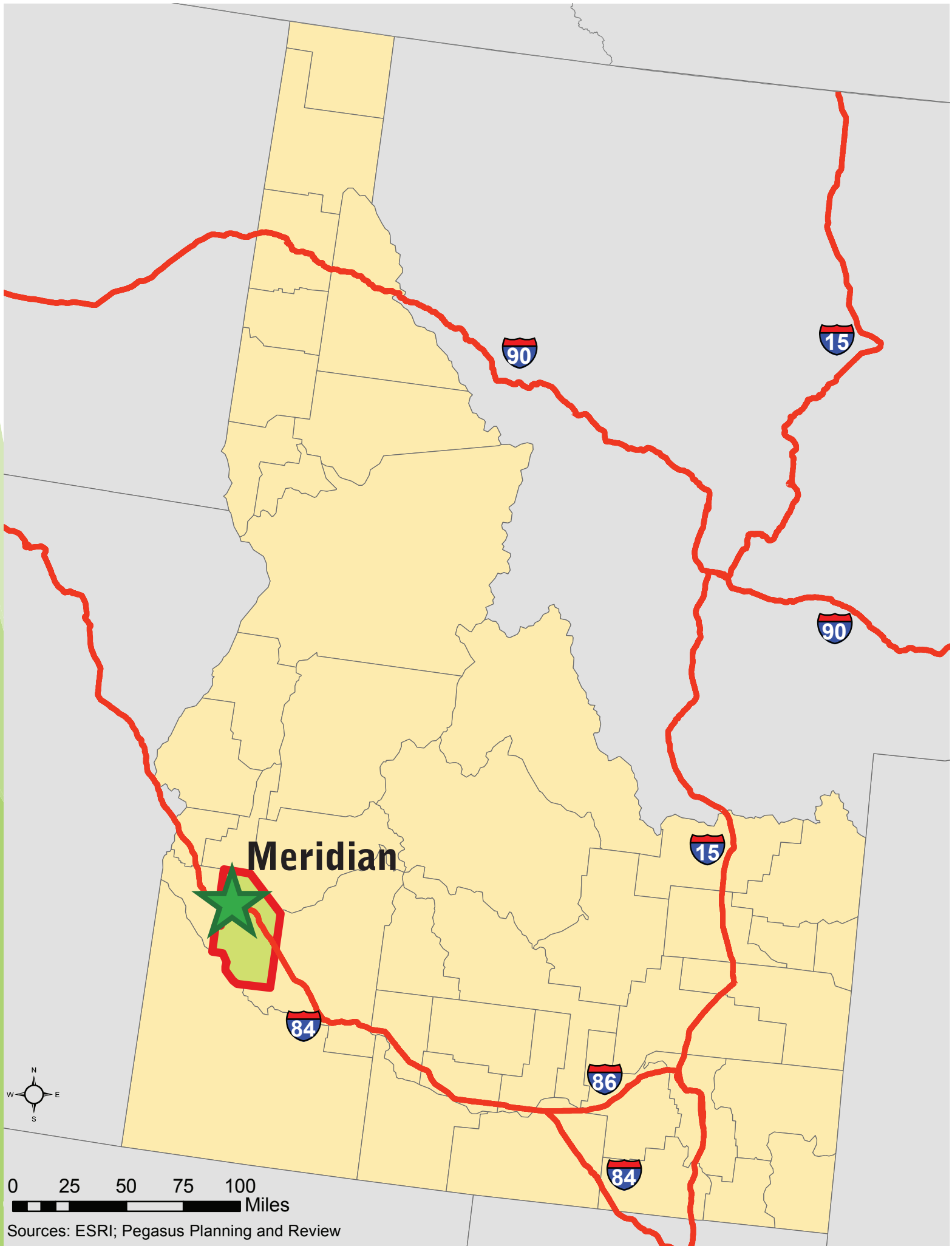
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Sources: ESRI; Pegasus Planning and Review

# Executive Summary

Economic development is the process a public sector entity takes to cultivate private sector investment. Infrastructure investments, incentives such as fee waivers, marketing collateral to bring attention to Meridian – all of these are forms of economic development.

Over the past three decades, the City of Meridian experienced a rate of population and employment growth that would be considered exceptional for any U.S. city. Furthermore, the regional dynamics that fueled this rapid growth suggest that the City and regional trajectory is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. Forecasts by Compass, the region's transportation planning agency, strongly support this assumption.

Given these trends, Meridian's governmental and civic leaders therefore face a critical inflection point. The question before them is not "will Meridian grow?" but rather "**how** will Meridian grow?" Above all, can Meridian's leaders proactively shape an economic development strategy that will promote the type of growth its citizens' desire?

This Economic Development Audit and Strategy is a response to that question. It charts a path toward sustainable growth by focusing on diversification of the City's economy and recommendations to strengthen Meridian's entrepreneurial and innovation ecosystem.

In 1990, Meridian was a rural community of approximately 10,000 people. Its current population of 80,000 is projected to climb to at least 100,000 by 2020. The City abuts Boise and is now the 3rd largest municipality in Idaho. Meridian's economic base has diversified through growth in the healthcare and retail sectors, in addition to a burgeoning office sector.

Meridian has accomplished this remarkably rapid expansion with just one staff person (FTE) formally designated to carry out the City's economic development agenda, and with a budget that is half that committed by cities half its size. However, as other communities have found, managing a community's growth strategically -- to direct it in specific directions versus merely reacting to events and external dynamics -- may require additional personnel resources, and most likely different skill sets than those that have worked well in the past.

There is truth in the saying, "If you always do what you always did, you always get what you always got". Growth is an indicator of success, but it frequently is accompanied by significant costs or growing pains. In the face of these, adopting a philosophy of actively managing the City's growth through strategic investments and policies represents an opportunity for continued improvement.

In seeking to address Meridian's current realities and opportunities, this Economic Development Strategy is built on the following key findings from the Economic Audit:

- City revenues (to provide essential services) are too dependent on growth of the retail sector; the economic base is not sufficiently diversified.
- There is insufficient collaboration among business/ education/workforce providers
- Despite strong population growth, the community is not especially appealing to "Millennials" – a key demographic for businesses, particularly in sectors such as technology.

Economic development is the process through which the public sector cultivates and encourages private sector investment. Infrastructure investments, incentives such as fee waivers, or marketing activities that brings attention to Meridian represent some of the tactics and traditional forms of economic development. Various initiatives can be devised that will spur certain types of growth; others will produce different results.

Historically, the State of Idaho has had a more limited set of economic development tools compared to neighboring states of Utah, Oregon, and Washington. Consequently the City of Meridian has been at a competitive disadvantage in its efforts to direct growth in desired directions. New economic development programs recently enacted by the State represent a change in this competitive landscape. Against this backdrop the time is therefore ripe for Meridian to take a fresh and creative look how best to stimulate private sector investment.

- Past “Quality of Place” investments have been focused largely on the needs and activities of families, and need to be broadened to appeal to all demographics.
- There is a lack of identifiable tourism assets and companion tourism marketing initiatives.
- Farmland in the region is facing increasing pressure from suburban development, threatening key economic and cultural assets.
- Insufficient programs, capabilities and resources are committed to developing the community’s

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preneurial and innovation ecosystems.

- To sustain Meridian’s future business competitiveness and quality of life, there is a need for targeted and proactive economic development efforts supported by additional resources.

The following Catalyst Projects therefore are designed to jumpstart implementation of this Strategy:

1. **Ag Innovation Campus:** Create a campus setting where the regions’ educational institutions (K-20) can partner with the Agribusiness and farming community to strengthen the talent pipeline matched to key occupations and skill requirements emerging in Agricultural-related industries; the Campus may also function as a center for academic-industry collaboration on research and technology commercialization.
2. **Agritourism Development:** Establish an “Ag Experience Center” that positions Meridian as a hub and jumping off point for visitors to explore the region’s Ag-heritage and Agri-Tourism amenities.
3. **Ag-based Real Estate Development** (“Agrarian Urbanism”): Partner with developers to create diversified mixed-use neighborhoods built around an organic, community-supported farm. Cutting edge urban design elements will create a harmonious environment at the rural-urban interface.
4. **Downtown Conference Center:** Develop a multi-purpose performing arts and events venue to serve business needs and community desires for a wider range of local entertainment and meeting options, in the heart of Meridian. The center should provide an active space with at least 18-hour entertainment options.

5. **Venture Meridian:** Establish a robust entrepreneurship program in the heart of Downtown Meridian to create an engine for growth through start-up activity, increase the day-time population downtown, and to plant the flag for entrepreneurship as a signature element of Meridian’s new “corporate culture” and brand. Ideally partnered with a regional entity that has a proven track record for commercializing research and innovative new business ideas.

The Catalyst Projects outlined above will be integrated with the following six recommended Strategies:

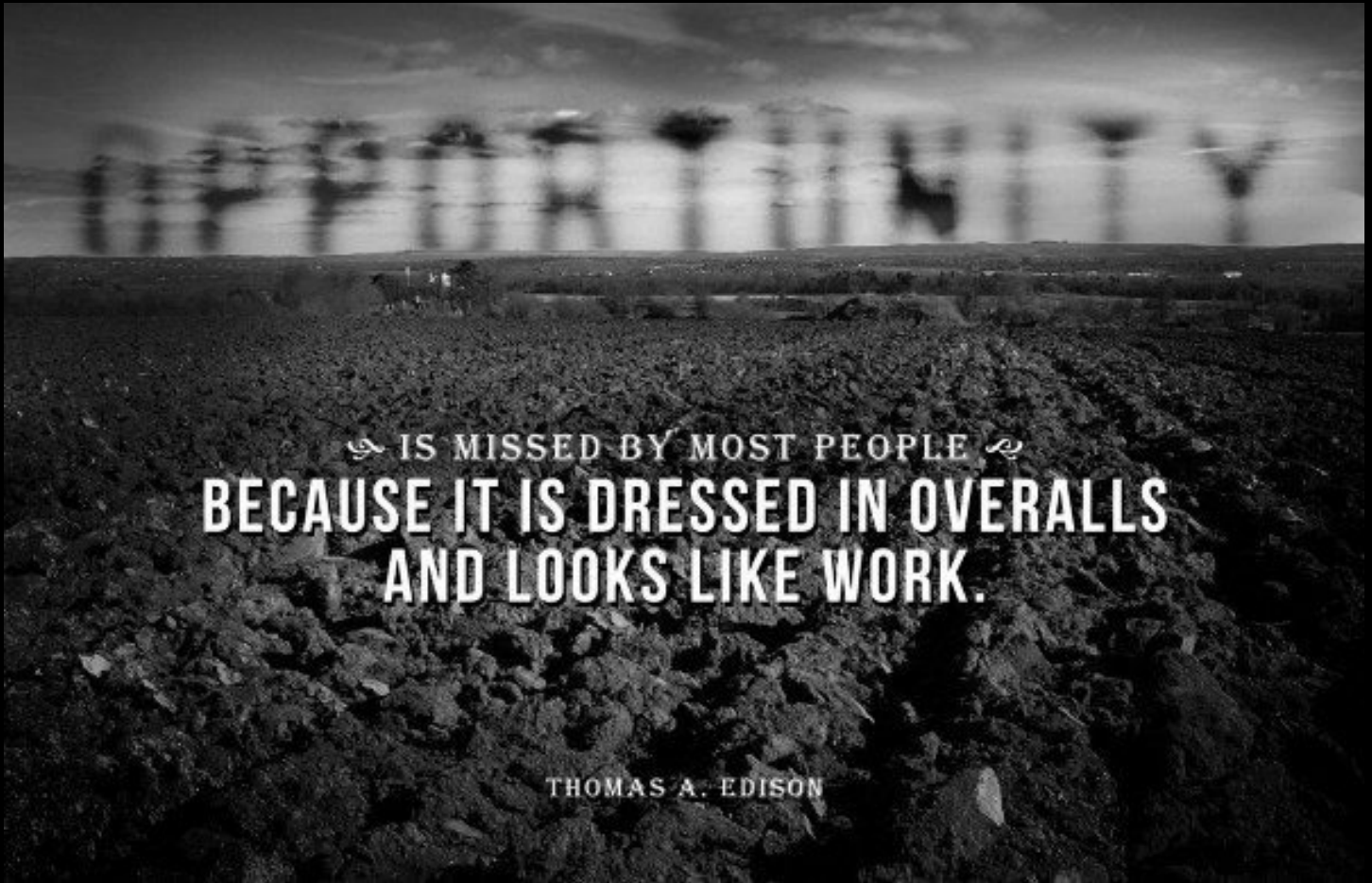
1. Talent and Innovation Ecosystem
2. Entrepreneurship and Small Business
3. Tourism Development
4. Land Use, Infrastructure and Transportation
5. Downtown
6. Quality of Place

The Audit revealed that Meridian has done an excellent job of supporting the needs of its businesses and residents, which has allowed it to attain its current level of economic and population growth. However, this Strategic Plan is focused on the future. It will build upon existing community assets and the outstanding past work of City leaders and staff.

And, while its recommendations are designed to support future policy direction and leadership by the City of Meridian, it should also be considered a guiding road-map for the City’s key partners in the economic development enterprise, including the Meridian Chamber of Commerce, Meridian Development Corporation, and the Boise Valley Economic Partnership. All of these (and possibly other) public and private sector stakeholders must play a role in implementing these recommendations, even as the City provides essential leadership and support to the economic development process.







IS MISSED BY MOST PEOPLE  
**BECAUSE IT IS DRESSED IN OVERALLS  
AND LOOKS LIKE WORK.**

THOMAS A. EDISON

*REMEMBER THAT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IS NOT A SPRINT,  
IT IS A MARATHON.*

*MERIDIAN'S LEADERS MUST KEEP A LONG-RANGE  
PERSPECTIVE IN MIND: ADOPTING THIS STRATEGY IS ONLY  
THE FIRST STEP IN A LONG-TERM ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
PROGRAM FOR THE CITY OF MERIDIAN.*

# Background

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In January 2014, the City of Meridian contracted with Pegasus Planning and Development to perform an Audit of the City's current economic development policies and practices, and to use the Audit as a basis to develop an Economic Development Strategy. This report summarizes the findings from the Audit and provides a Strategy/Roadmap that will help Meridian leaders diversify its economy with a more sophisticated and proactive approach to economic development.

Multiple organizations are involved in Meridian's economic development efforts, including the Chamber of Commerce, Meridian Development Corporation and Boise Valley Economic Partnership. All of these groups

work effectively with each other but many efforts take place in silos, without a game plan for how respective efforts work with one another, and what is the ultimate game plan. As one stakeholder said, "we are not all on the same sheet of music."

Recognizing the need to have a collective strategy for all groups and a targeted and proactive approach to economic development, City leaders began a process internally of auditing some of their programs as it relates to economic development. This process is just the beginning. Given the scope of this project, **stakeholders must realize that more work and resources are needed for successful implementation.**

# Methodology & Findings

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The economic development Audit for Meridian utilized 3 levels of inquiry: literature review, qualitative research, and quantitative analysis.

Literature review involved a thorough investigation into existing reports, city planning studies and policy documents. The qualitative methodology used a mix of stakeholder input methods to integrate the perspectives and expertise of community members with those of governmental, institutional and business leaders. The quantitative analysis examined relevant demographic and economic variables, regional industries, and occupational employment trends. More details on the details of our analysis can be found in the Appendix section.

The approach utilizes these inputs and integrates them within this action plan, while prioritizing the goals of the City of Meridian. Figure 1 illustrates the general economic development areas examined during the Audit. Overall findings are as follows:

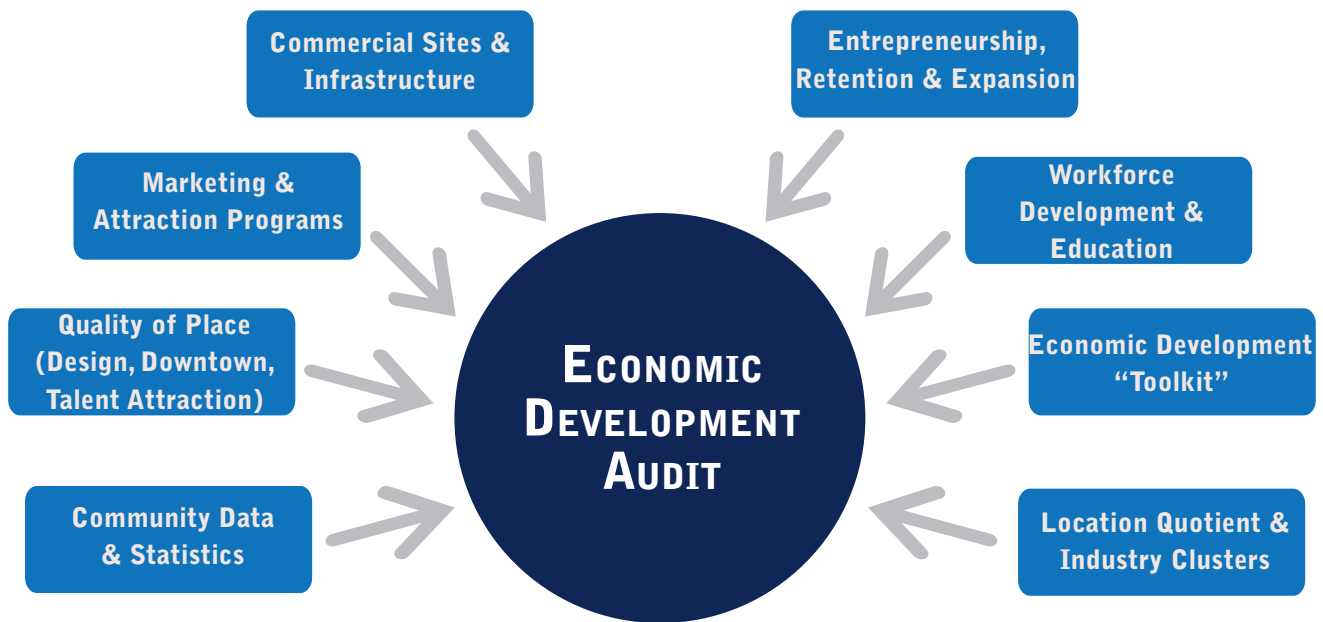
## Qualitative Analysis Overview

The City of Meridian has been successful in providing excellent quality of life amenities such as parks, high performing schools and a safe environment, while still maintaining a "small-town feel" among residents. Many interviewees noted the community is "a great place to raise a family" and recent national rankings confirm the statement. The City serves the region as an affordable place to live that is centrally located. People value that it is "far enough" from the big-city life of Boise and that despite its rapid growth, it is still a great home environment. Echoing these general findings, large employers in the area are happy with their location in Meridian and a majority of businesses stated their primary reasons for locating there were (1) proximity to consumers and suppliers, and (2) quality of life. Large businesses like working with the City and feel they have a good relationship with City staff and officials.

## Workforce Limitations

Whether created locally or recruited, businesses and industry representatives noted the need for a more



**Figure 1: Components of the Economic Development Audit**

Source: Pegasus Planning and Development

skilled workforce or for better programs geared to “re-skilling” or “up-skilling” the workforce. This need was particularly acute among agribusinesses. Businesses noted both in-person and via survey that there are opportunities to improve education-industry collaboration.

### Business Needs

Meridian has a strong large business base, but there is a need to build and continue to establish a stronger tool kit of entrepreneurial support resources. Small businesses need assistance in understanding permitting processes and are in great need of technical assistance and training on a consistent basis. While the City’s creation of a Small Business Coordinator will specifically addresses capacity needs in understanding the permitting process, additional technical assistance in the areas of business and financial management is needed.

The City has strong business parks and office development, all of which are privately-owned and operated. The exception is a facility (the former City Hall) that has been retrofitted as incubator space downtown. Light

Industrial space exists and continues to be built, but land and lease prices are higher in Meridian than in other neighboring communities; prices are not competitive with surrounding communities to the west or near the airport. However, the lease/price differential is mitigated when including other ancillary costs and permitting, Meridian still remains competitive for certain types of manufacturing and servicing aspects of the regions supply chain. The lack of a large meeting venue presents a challenge to the business community, and to local residents in search of a greater array of entertainment options.

### Growing Infrastructure Problems

Traffic congestion in the valley was noted as a significant challenge to the City’s quality of life and competitiveness as a business location. Long commutes on highways and congestion in local arterial roads are a major frustration for residents.

The City has carried out an excellent water reclamation project in Western Meridian, north of the Interstate and impacting the Fields and the 10-Mile area. Improvements and expanded infrastructure will yield economic benefits for the City.

A comprehensive utility policy is needed to capitalize on these and similar infrastructure investments. Designating targeted development zones can also aid in promoting development patterns that reduce costs and better utilizing the existing infrastructure currently in place.



East-bound traffic, I-84 and Ten Mile Interchange

### Under-developed Downtown

The success of downtown is a critical element to the overall success of the City. Strengthening downtown was consistently recommended by the business community. Many also noted that the City retail environment is dominated by chain restaurants and retailers; business survey respondents would like to see more local, independent businesses. Within the City of Meridian, The Village has been a great success, though there is still pent-up demand for more entertainment and variety of “things to do” for people of diverse backgrounds and stages of life. This has been acknowledged by area leadership, and there is already momentum to shift this. Expectations of the development community focus on working within a predictable City process while understanding how to leverage the investment that will be occurring on adjacent parcels. A fine grain downtown implementation plan is needed to demonstrate the commitment by the City.

Main Street, Downtown Meridian



### Unfocused Identity

While the City has grown with exceptional rapidity in the last two decades, diversification is now a concern – diversity of housing, entertainment, jobs and industries are all issues the City must now focus on to ensure its future economic and human vitality.

Meridian sometimes appears to be challenged by misperceptions held by residents from the surrounding region. The City is seen by some from outside the community as having a high crime rate, despite the reality of being a very safe, family-oriented community. Regional residents cite as a weakness the perception that there are limited entertainment options (beyond shopping), and a distinctive cultural presence is lacking.

A widespread belief exists that the school system as a whole is weak. Consultant’s research indicates that some disparity among schools exists—Meridian School District No. 2 produces some of the best and brightest young minds coming into the Treasure Valley workforce, and its programs are exceptional by national standards. However, pockets of rural and urban poverty do exist within the City boundaries and these are reflected by some data. In general, Meridian’s regional image is lower than it should be, given its otherwise strong economic and cultural assets.

Agriculture is a part of the area’s heritage and identity, and represents an opportunity for branding that has the potential to resonate with both long-time community residents and transplants. While agriculture remains a fundamental aspect of Meridian’s civic identity and of its economy, agricultural production will continue to decline in the area unless aggressive steps are taken vis-a-vis the Idaho legal context as it relates to agricultural land preservation. (E.g. through local zoning and land use policies, innovative easement programs, and/or the scheduling of infrastructure investments.) Efforts to preserve agriculture as a viable sector of the economy will remain a challenge for years to come. Preserving Meridian’s ag-heritage as a core competency of the region, however, is feasible, as is pursuing ag-related target industries in the technology sphere.



## Economic Development Structure and Partners

The City of Meridian has one full-time employee focused on economic development and special projects. The Mayor is also actively involved in economic development and special projects. The economic development budget for Meridian is half that of cities similar in size in Idaho. While the City does well in strengthening some key industries, it devotes fewer resources than other cities of comparable size. Competing at the level of the region while continuing to make additional improvements will require added capacity. Consultant's recommendations will require additional capacity to implement signature projects and initiatives. Given the additional economic development focus the City will be undertaking, at least one additional employee should be budgeted, in addition to more resources for marketing and implementing key Economic Development Strategies.

## Quantitative Analysis Overview

The demographic, economic, occupation and industry analysis revealed several key quantifiable issues that have bearing on Meridian's economic success. These were discussed in detail throughout the project, and all data analysis is found in the Appendix. The points below are the most relevant to the Economic Development Strategy.

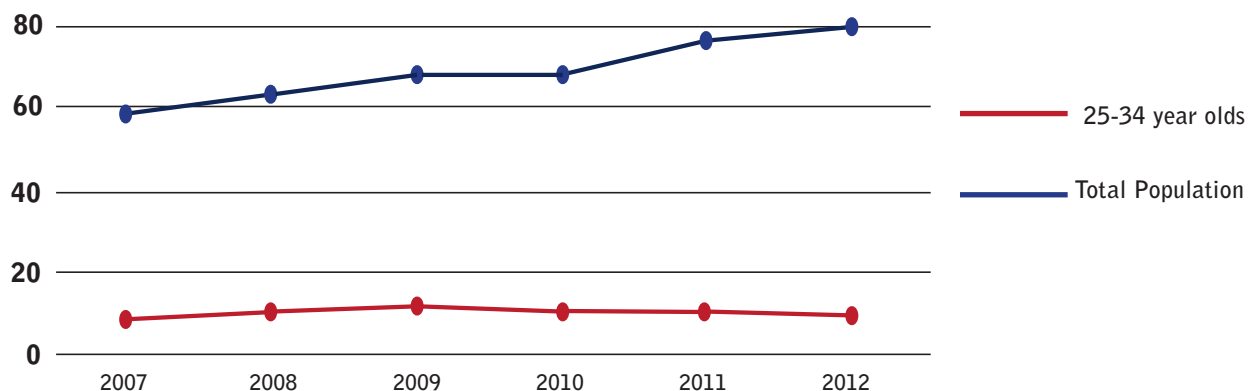
## Missing Demographic

Most of the growth Meridian has seen has been among families – so, children and 35-45 year old populations have grown substantially, while the Millennials (25-35) have not chosen to move or stay in Meridian, see Figure 2. One could speculate that there is not enough to do in Meridian for this demographic (entertainment choices, urban living, bicycle mobility), but the fact remains that Meridian must become more appealing to this very important demographic. In the next 5-10 years they will comprise the largest portion of the American workforce.

## Growth within State Impacts Talent Pool

Much of Meridian's and the region's growth is migration from within the state and NW US. Several of Meridian's competitors, however, get most of their growth from either natural birth (Salt Lake City) or international migration (Seattle, Portland). The impacts of this for Meridian and Idaho is that unlike the international cities, Meridian's employers will rely on the workforce that has been raised in Idaho and the NW, and consequently, their labor force skills are weak – due to Idaho's poor educational attainment levels and poorly funded workforce programs. This issue begs the need to improve the local workforce-business collaboration.

**Figure 2. Meridian Population Growth:  
Millennials v. Total  
(in thousands)**



## Land and Lease Costs

Meridian's land prices are more similar to Boise than to Nampa and Caldwell. Every indicator examined as part of this project points to a much higher cost for all uses in Meridian than in Nampa and Caldwell. Those two neighboring communities have also experienced a significant amount more absorption of industrial space than Meridian; while Meridian has experienced a much higher absorption of retail and office space.

## Industry Targets

The Target Industry analysis revealed that Meridian is strong in several sectors but lacks diversity among its businesses. These recommended target industries should be considered in light of the Fields District initiatives and overall economic development efforts, including workforce development and entrepreneurship programs.

- 1. Ag Tech:** Composite category including research, development, production, and sales of agricultural machinery, measuring devices, and medical foods.
- 2. Scientific Research and Development:** Original investigation or application of research for the creation of new products.
- 3. Management, Scientific and Technical Consulting Services:** Firms that influence how business, governments, and institutions make decisions by delivering services in the form of knowledge, experience, special skills, or creativity.

## 4. Boiler, Tank, and Shipping Container

**Manufacturing:** Service Ag Supply chain and transportation needs.

- 5. Grocery and related product Wholesalers:** Non-durable goods wholesalers; in this case, this includes distributors of foods and specialized agricultural products.

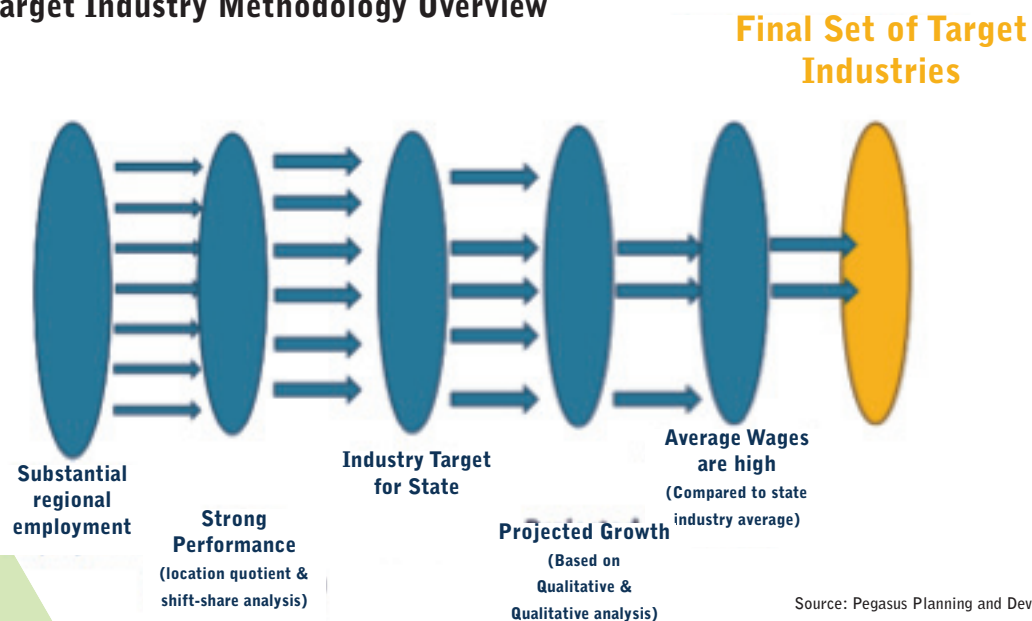
- 6. Medical & Diagnostic Laboratories:** Providing analytic or diagnostic services to medical profession.

- 7. Outpatient Care Centers:** Mental Health & Substance Abuse; Family Planning.

- 8. Other Hospitals:** Specialty hospitals; treatment to inpatients with a specific type of condition.

These industries are clear examples of the region's core strengths in agricultural development, professional services, and medical provision. Agriculture's role in the regional economy is of particular importance, and its cultivation will require continued efforts into new innovative contexts and applications. However, all of these target industries will provide a basket of economic development benefits (ie. jobs, property tax, sales tax) to the Meridian region. This reinforces their importance in the context of the economic development catalysts and strategies described in this report.

**Figure 3. Target Industry Methodology Overview**



Source: Pegasus Planning and Development





# Economic Development Strategy

*DIVERSIFY THE ECONOMY BY CULTIVATING TALENT,  
DEVELOPING AN INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM, AND CONTINUING TO  
IMPROVE QUALITY OF PLACE TO KEEP AND ATTRACT TALENT.*

This Economic Development Strategy follows an extensive Audit. The Strategy is focused on detailing steps to implement five (5) Catalyst Projects and six (6) Recommendations.

## five CATALYST INITIATIVES

- 1. Ag Innovation Campus:** Regional educational institutions can partner with the business community to create a specialized campus to strengthen the K-20 pipeline to satisfy current and future employment demand in key occupations and skills sets.
- 2. Agritourism Development:** Positioning Meridian as a jumping off point for exploring regional ag-heritage & cultural tourism amenities by the creation of an Ag-Experience Center.
- 3. Ag-focused Real Estate Development:** Foster diversified mixed-use neighborhood built around a community-supported farm.
- 4. Downtown Conference Center:** A performing arts and events center to service business needs and community desires for more at-home entertainment options, placed in the heart of the community.
- 5. Venture Meridian:** Placing a BSU-managed entrepreneurship facility in the heart of Downtown Meridian to create an engine for growth through start-up activity, increase day-time population downtown, and link entrepreneurship to the





# six RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Talent & Innovation Ecosystem Cultivation:** Leveraging education-business collaborations, talent development, and entrepreneurship to establish a foundation for making Meridian a capital for high-end research & commercialization activity.
2. **Business Expansion:** Improving small business, entrepreneurship, and retention and expansion services. Meridian will have increased capacity to pursue target industries, and local economic development organizations will partner with the City to comprehensively address needs for businesses of a variety of sizes industries.
3. **Tourism:** Providing more and better entertainment options for locals and tourists from a diversity of life-stages and lifestyles. These efforts will also rely heavily on existing regional amenities and establishing Meridian as the hub for Treasure Valley tourism.
4. **Land Use, Transportation and Infrastructure:** Improving Meridian residents' connectivity within the City and to the surrounding valley through a combination of highway trails, and bike infrastructure expansion. Leveraging existing wastewater infrastructure in underdeveloped areas (such as the Ten Mile Interchange) is also an important opportunity. Using infrastructure as a manner of promoting sustainable economic development of Meridian.
5. **Downtown:** Strengthening the heart of culture and community for the City by improving the public realm, increasing downtown employment and activity, and promoting a strong independent business base for the neighborhood.
6. **Quality of Place:** Making Meridian's place-based assets attractive, inclusive, and competitive. Sending signals that Meridian has something new, better, and different to offer the valley's talent base.

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*A "Next Steps" section follows these Catalysts and Strategies. It is important to remember that economic development is not a sprint. Economic Development is a marathon, so keep a long-ranged perspective in mind, and understand that adopting this Strategy and implementing the Recommendations within are the first step in a longer term Economic Development Program for the City of Meridian that will involve every department of the City.*

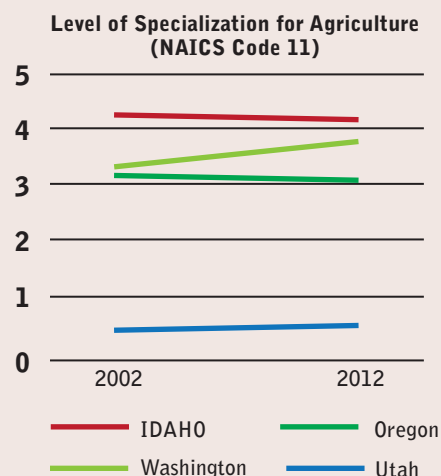
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## Catalyst 1: Ag-Innovation Campus



### Related Findings

- One of the most immediate needs of large and advanced industry leaders in agriculture across the region is workforce, particularly finding workers with both the industry expertise and technical skills in computing, engineering, and research
- Ag is a core competency of the city, region, and state (chart to the right illustrates relative strength in Idaho)
- Industry is supportive of education in Ag already (recently organized to boost state spending on FFA programs)



### Agricultural Employment

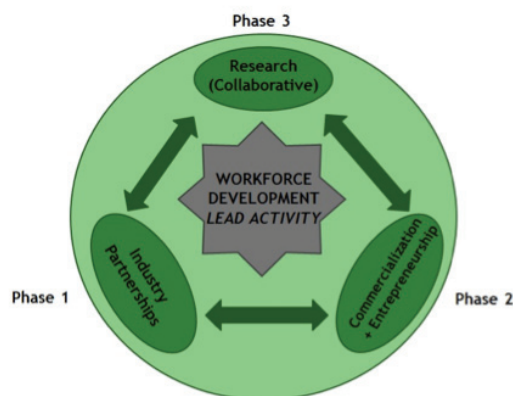
State	2002			2012			Change		
	Total Employment	Percent of Employment	Location Quotient	Total Employment	Percent of Employment	Location Quotient	Total Employment	Percent of Employment	Location Quotient
Idaho	20,904	4.49%	4.18	22,422	4.45%	4.14	7.3%	-.9%	-1.0%
Oregon	45,053	3.41%	3.17	46,677	3.40%	3.16	3.7%	-.3%	-.3%
Washington	76,394	3.55%	3.3	95,546	4.02%	3.74	25.1%	13.2%	13.3%
Utah	4,137	.48%	.45	4,898	.49%	.45	18.4%	2.1%	0.0%

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics; Pegasus Planning and Development

### Context:

An innovative community builds institutions and cultivates a culture open to and supportive of experimentation, education and skills development, and new concepts and techniques. This type of high-growth climate cannot be developed ad hoc; rather, it depends on a long-term process of investing in human capital and relationships. An economically vibrant community depends on an ecosystem of agents and organizations, working towards incremental improvement of the local business climate.

Figure 4. Meridian-Boise Regional Ag Innovation Ecosystem



Source: Pegasus Planning and Development



The first “rung” on the ladder of resilient local growth is the cultivation and retention of high-skill, talented workers in a range of technical and managerial fields. The talent development sphere is the “engine” for deepening skills specialization and industry advancement. As the skilled workforce and entrepreneurial communities grow, with constant cooperation with established companies, local investment will increase. This provides the base necessary for industry growth, research and development, and technology commercialization that yields major growth in high-quality jobs.

The first step on this path to substantial industry development is the cultivation of a pool of workers matching the skill sets demanded by regional industry, and tying that pool to entrepreneurial programs and industry targeting initiatives.

**Recommendation #1: Integrate the establishment of the Innovation Campus with the efforts of the Fields District Report, Recommendation 1:**

**Recommendation 1A.** Engage Industry with Educational Institutions to Define Concrete Talent Development Goals, Tactics, Outcomes and Metrics

- o Utilize Target Industry and Target Occupations analysis to guide the creation of a Talent Development Initiative
- o Review the Assumptions and Implications of the Target Industries
- o Show how the signature cluster development strategy for Agriculture – with its three catalytic initiatives -- fits within Meridian’s overall economic development strategy.
- o Initial focus of Talent Development programs should be more narrowly focused than merely “all of Agriculture”; build Talent Development capabilities based on:
  - a) priority needs articulated by industry
  - b) priorities resulting from Target Industry Occupational Analysis
  - c) priority areas identified by Meridian School District #2, CWI, and universities
- o Consider focusing the Initial Talent Development, Collaborative Research and Commercialization efforts on “Ag Tech” – Multidisciplinary and emerging application of Information Technology to:
  - innovative agricultural equipment
  - cutting-edge agriculture production

**According a recent study by Idaho Business for Education (IBE)...**

- Idaho has the lowest rate of graduates immediately matriculating after graduation in the country.
- Currently only 41% of Idaho workers between 25-34 years old have a work-ready certificate or higher (only 26% hold at least a Bachelor’s degree or higher)
- By 2020, 61% of workers will need a certificate or higher at 43% of those worker will need at least a Bachelor’s degree

processes (including agricultural drones, precision agriculture, environmental assessment, etc.)

- bioenergy, biomaterials
- water, energy, environmental sciences
- o Establish specific, measurable goals, e.g. number of graduates in specific degree or certificate programs or fields; goals for internships or experiential education, etc.

**Recommendation 1B.** Establish an “Agricultural Talent Development, Commercialization & Research Campus” at a strategic location within Meridian.

- The Campus would serve as a nucleus around which various related agricultural initiatives may be developed and would revolve.
- The campus should build on Meridian’s agricultural heritage and direct agricultural assets, while leveraging the significant agricultural education and research assets that exist within the Treasure Valley.

[Alternative name: Meridian Ag Innovation Campus -- A Center for Talent Development, Research and Commercialization]



Richland Community College & Agribusiness Corridor

Photo Source: MidwestRenew.org

**Recommendation 1C.** Create a Business Plan for the Ag-focused Talent Development Initiative + Ag Innovation Campus

- Potential Elements
  - o Virtual (to start) versus Place-based
    - Rationale – how to evolve from initial virtual to eventual Place-based
  - o Preliminary Site parameters (size, locational criteria)
  - o Preliminary Building parameters (size, function)
  - o Preliminary programming
  - o Preliminary identification of funding sources / options / techniques
- Consider possible synergies by co-locating the proposed “Agricultural Talent Development, Commercialization & Research Campus” with Recommendation #2 Agritourism and Recommendation #3 for Ag-focused land development (E.g. related to costs of land assembly and infrastructure, marketing / visibility, critical mass, etc.)

**Recommendation 1D. Create a structure for the Ag-focused Talent Development - Initiative**

- As part of longer-term implementation of the Initiatives and Business Plan outlined above, create an umbrella leadership structure, whose purpose and potential benefits include:
  - o engage key stakeholders
  - o cement public-private partnership
  - o provide strategic planning direction on an ongoing basis
  - o help establish regional foundations
  - o support fundraising efforts
  - o raise visibility and create a brand

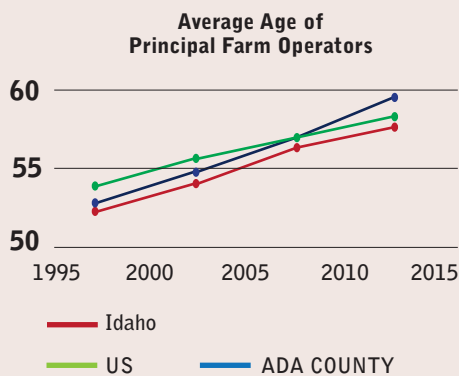


## Catalyst 2: Agritourism Development

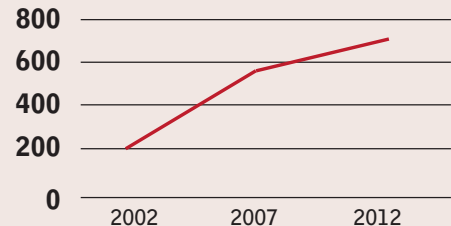


### Related Findings

- Ada County has lost 21.6% of its farmland acreage since 1992.
- Need for more young talent to replace older agriculture producers.
- Education will be a tool for making the industry more interesting/attractive
- Need for more tourism amenities for residents and visitors in Meridian



Total Value of Agritourism Recreational Services on Farmland in the US (in millions)



- Most attractions are located throughout the valley, staging Meridian as the hub utilizes its strategic location in relation to regional attractions
- Ag-loss and preservation tools are important issues at the State and local levels – these initiatives are critical

### Context:

Agri-Tourism can be thought of as “experiential tourism” – that is, tourism that is less passive and focused on interacting with the local way of life or environment. While once considered a niche market, it is becoming a major industry segment and is one of the fastest growing forms of visitor tourism in the world. Agritourism is focused on learning about and experiencing farming and agricultural recreation. It is inherently regional and it relies entirely on local authenticity—linked to an area’s local food culture.

Agritourism as a form of recreation can be traced back to the 1800s when the city gentry would visit pastoral landscapes to escape the summer swelter of urban areas. More recently it has become commercialized, with some parts of the world almost totally reliant on this for economic vitality.

Treasure Valley has the soil quality to support nearly 200 different types of agricultural products. This kind of diversity can be featured and build a greater appreciation of local residents for the rareness and fragility of this landscape.

The multiple elements of the overall Agri-Tourism strategy should fit within the framework of Meridian’s Economic Development Strategic Plan, and should be mutually reinforcing with other economic development and Fields District recommendations. Agriculture and Agritourism should be included as key elements in the city’s future economic development and comprehensive planning efforts. This recommendation includes a signature initiative but its success is very much linked to an understanding of the region’s cultural heritage. It is a jumping off point to experiencing the unique agriculture heritage of the Treasure Valley. It is the “first tier” attraction to a wide array of cultural assets and experiences.

Tourism is often seasonal and can be cyclical, but its limitations do not mean it should be ignored. Tourism can generate sales tax, seasonal employment and amenities for locals, and visibility to attract new residents and talent. This initiative will create a deeper sense of place, will have local and regional benefits, and



will build additional support for Meridian's other initiatives in the Strategic Plan, including highway expansion. It will be important for planning groups to adequately represent the interests of all stakeholders in Agri-Tourism development.

## Agritourism Details

**Sub classifications:** ecotourism, garden tourism, guest ranches, wine tourism, dairy tourism, and rural tourism (related to experiencing the lifestyle of living in the country, its culture, religion, and building an ethnographic understanding of rural human activity)

**Market:** The largest market segment for Agritourism is Baby Boomers followed by Millennials, though these types of activities are typically friendly to all age groups. The PLACE is the product, and all the related experiences native to the place. By 2020, US/Canadian Baby Boomers (between ages 55 to 74) will number over 84 million. They are the most affluent and educated generation of retirees in the history of either country. They are sophisticated travelers interested in more than conventional attractions. They seek an experience and a sense of place.

**Below:**

**Kiyokawa Family Orchard, Parkdale, OR**  
**Apple picking and Slow Food Feast**



Source: Condensatraveler.com

## Recommendation #2: Create a comprehensive Ag-Tourism strategy centered on Meridian as the “Ag-Destination Hub of the Treasure Valley”

**Recommendation 2A.** Convene local stakeholders as a Meridian Agritourism Steering Committee to carry out strategic planning and guide implementation efforts

- o Before major initiatives are pursued, strategic planning must provide the staging ground
- o Because Agritourism is naturally a regional initiative, Meridian needs to organize locally to ensure that products and outcomes of developing regional tourism can be directly linked to local impact.
- o The City should lead an effort to convene interested developers, land owners, the Chamber of Commerce (the lead organization for Tourism marketing), and a cross-section of the community in strategic planning. The Committee will create a strategy plan and bylaws for the purpose of placing Meridian as a hub (not an all-inclusive environment or stand-alone attraction) for exploring Agritourism and cultural heritage in the region. The region's Agritourism development thereby becomes a mutually enforcing effort: the more that the region's agriculture base is improved, preserved, and made amenable to tourists and locals, Meridian's centrality and prominence will rise.



Source: Travelandleisure.com



**Recommendation 2B.** Convene regional Agritourism stakeholders to form a Treasure Valley Regional Agritourism entity (Note: these recommendations are well-supported by the University of Idaho College of Law report on Agritourism at the Rural-Urban Interface)

- o Comprised of: County officials, Rural Development administrators, City representatives, land/farm owners, dairy owners, producer groups, Chambers of commerce, tourism marketing entities, and local residents
- o Entity can serve to:
  - Provide a regional basis of support for developing local strategies to promote ag-heritage oriented tourism or Agritourism
  - Conduct a cultural heritage asset mapping that can inform the local Agritourism steering committee of additional resources and experiences (see Appendix)
  - Design themed routes for cultural tourism cohorts (ex: Ag Architecture, Historic Barn Tour, Wine Tourism, Small farmstead trail)
  - Create an Agri-Tourism marketing fund
  - Lobby for creation of “agriculture promotion districts” for conservation and preservation of ag uses
  - Advocate for changes to State policies related to state highway signage for marketing
- o Meridian should support and integrate existing regional tourism plans and initiatives as “spokes” with Meridian’s new initiatives placing the city at the center (promoting connectivity). Existing initiatives of interest:
  - Treasure Valley Scenic Byways initiative
  - The Sunny Slope Wine Trail
  - Meridian’s Wine Coop on Main Street
- o Relocation of the Garden City Fairgrounds—which is immanent though a longer-range proposition that depends on building consensus among regional stakeholders—could be integrated with the local Agri-tourism strategic plan. Meridian could

position itself as the ideal location for the fairground’s relocation the potential to become a “Southwest Idaho” State Fair.

**Recommendation 2C.** Create a high profile, Ag-focused “destination attraction” in Meridian that provides a unique and complementary amenity for the Boise and Treasure Valley region.

- o Provide a visitor experience that appeals both to existing residents as a weekend, seasonal or occasional activity; with sufficient scale and critical mass to provide a draw for visitors from beyond the region, or those who are “passing through” but seeking an expanded range of tourist offerings.



Source: Pegasus Planning and Development

**Bitner Vineyards, an Award-winning national attraction only 15 minutes from Meridian, and part of the Sunny Slow Wine Trail of Southwest Idaho.**

- o Purpose: tourism amenities for the city, educating the region about the unique assets of the valley and the need to preserve them, develop an interest in ag and local food culture
- o Build on precedents / models for such a “destination attraction” from other states such as Oregon, Indiana, Kentucky and Texas
- o The City of Meridian should not lead the planning process but should be a part of the strategic planning entity and assist in implementation by way of partnerships and fast-track permitting.

## CORE ELEMENTS SHOULD INCLUDE:

### 1. The Ag Heritage Center

- Exhibit Hall with opportunities to observe and learn about Idaho's agricultural history, present and future
- ILLUSTRATIVE Programming
  - o Permanent Idaho Agriculture Museum, including interactive exhibits and revolving changing exhibits
  - o Learning Center to help advance Idaho agriculture through education
  - o Agriculture Library and Media Center with latest high-tech equipment linking to universities and other sites
  - o Agriculture Hall of Fame – recognizing past and current families and individuals as well as major corporate leaders
  - o Virtual Farm Experiences within the museum, including operating large farm machinery, live animals
  - o Seed, Soil, Sun: from seed to table
  - o An "Idaho Preferred" Center for Farms and Food – Education about importance of land to table movement
  - o Food Science-plants, animal, and value-added products
  - o "Horsepower" -- how farming has changed from plow to state-of-the-art
  - o Potatoes and Key Crops -- history and usage
  - o Agricultural antiques
- Energy Pavilion
  - o Center and campus could be designed to produce 100 percent of energy required through combined use of wind, solar and geo thermal power.
  - o Sustainable / Alternative Energy technologies
  - o Water as a Resource
- Meeting/Trade Show/Assembly Area
  - o Multi-media 250-seat Theater, plus up to 1000-seat auditorium
  - o Communications Center/Learning Lab
  - o Meeting space for agricultural and non-agricultural groups
- Info Desk for Agri-Tourism -- advice for other things to see and do in the region (including recreational Tourism)
- Show Barn (12,000 sq. ft), Demonstration garden
- Farm Store
- Restaurant/Dining, Commercial Kitchen

### Interim Concept name:

### "Treasure Valley Ag Experience Center"

- 50 acre site (minimum recommended), with "working farm" exhibits
- Estimated investment for Phase I: approximately \$20 million
- Example Activities
  - o Farm Tours
  - o Farmers Market
  - o Seasonal Experiences: Pumpkin Patch Fun; Corn Mazes; Christmas tree cutting
  - o Restaurants and retail
  - o Local Craft and Holiday Store
  - o Petting Zoo
  - o Movie Nights
  - o Summer farm camps, chef camps for kids

### Precedents

From these, demonstrate "Order of Magnitude" data for Sites, Buildings and Funding

- Kentucky Ag Heritage Center (in planning)
- Huber Orchard, Winery and Vineyards  
<http://www.huberwinery.com>
- Fair Oaks Farms  
<http://www.fofarms.com>
- Chaney's Dairy Barn
- Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum, Austin, TX
- Connor Prairie, Fishers, IN
- Texas Agricultural Education and Heritage Center, Seguin, TX
- The Barn: Center for Agricultural Science and Heritage, Indianapolis, IN
- The Sage Center

### 2. Variation / Additional Elements A: Wine Region Visitor Experience / Center

- May be included as display, information center within the Ag Heritage Center facility

### 3. Variation / Additional Elements B: Working Dairy Farm – A "Visitor Experience"

- Includes production area for cheese and ice cream making, and visitor participation activities

### 4. Variation / Additional Elements C: U-Pick-Em Fruits and Vegetables (working fruit and vegetable farm section)





**Recommendation 2C.1 Site Selection Recommendations**

- Priority Site Selection criteria:
  - o located off of Highway 16 for connection to Scenic Byways and Sunny Slope Wine Trail
  - o Evaluate publicly-owned land that could be used
  - o Near major East-West corridor
- Shorter term ideal alternative: Ten Mile Interchange
  - o Already has necessary infrastructure
  - o Highly visible from I-84
  - o Closer to Meridian's remaining ag production area (south of I-84)
  - o Nearer to Downtown Meridian
- Longer term, secondary option: Fields District Area
  - o Challenge: will require connecting wastewater; much of the land is already spoken for by many developers; connectivity to the rest of the city is a longer-range proposition (Highway 16 +20/26 improvements)
  - o Opportunities:
    - Depending on location of innovation campus and Ag-focused real estate community, could have more land options to co-locate
    - Could encourage the creation of a "community activity node" in the Northwest corridor and encourage denser development practices for long-range planning
    - Proximity to Can-Ada border may help leverage regional support for relocating the Garden City Fairgrounds to this region and make the case for a Southwest Idaho Fair

**Recommendation 2C.2 Strategic and Business Plan Recommendation**

- Business Plan elements / Supporting Issues will need to be addressed
  - o ORGANIZATIONAL Recommendations: ensure representation by land owners; Agri-Tourism operators; agribusinesses; producer groups; potential philanthropic organizations; developers; local, regional, and state entities
  - o NEED for Champion[s]; / Partnerships and Buy-in
  - o Role of State Government will need to be defined
  - o Sources and Uses of Funds
  - o State, philanthropy, local (could come in non-fiduciary terms), or even a grassroots membership base



Photo Source: FOFarms.com



Photo Source: NWTimes.com

Fair Oak Farms, dairy farm experience center;  
Fair Oaks, Indiana

# Catalyst 3: Ag-based Land Development



## Related Findings

- Residential growth in Meridian will expand into Ada County and much of the County land will be annexed
- Subdivision development patterns are not compact and rarely will provide enough tax revenue to pay for City services.
- Ag loss in the Treasure Valley
- Public Works has created a Water Reclamation project that can be utilized for this initiative.
- Ag-based Land Developments in the US are highly successful
- The Fiscal Impact Analysis of a typical subdivision versus an Ag-based Land Development reveals a clear winner in Ag-based Land Development.

Loss of Farmland in Acres					
County	1992	2007	% Change (92-07)	2012	% Change (07-12)
Ada	232,879	191,477	-21.6%	144,049	-25%
Canyon	391,050	260,247	-50.3%	303,836	+17%
Gem	197,176	190,757	-3.4%	178,984	-6%
Elmore	353,528	346,550	-2.0%	344,820	0%

Source: US Agriculture Census

### Context:

Ada County lost 25% of its farmland from 2007 to 2012. Canyon County lost 50% of its farmland from 1992 to 2007. Much of the land in Meridian city limits that used to be farmland has been converted to subdivisions which have provided needed housing in the region.

The price of land in Meridian has increased substantially as these “greenfield” sites for new subdivisions become scarce amidst the incredible population growth in the region. Feedback from stakeholder interviews revealed that prices of farmland were \$5,000/acre in 1990 and are now well above \$100,000/acre.

As farmers in the Ada/Canyon County area age, and their dependents are not interested in taking on the farms, the offers from developers that farmers are receiving is appealing. By most accounts, a majority of the land in Ada County (which will more than likely become part of the City of Meridian through annexation) has already been “spoken for” by developers who have rights-to-purchase contracts for these lands.

Very little water or sewer exists in the Fields District; urban development would require significant infrastructure investment. This area and the Ten-Mile

vicinity to the south, can benefit from the wastewater reclamation project of the City of Meridian, and receive reclaimed water at reduced or free prices.

As a result of the need that developers will have for infrastructure investment in the Fields area, and with the interest the City has in preserving agricultural heritage, the City should embrace a program to foster a new type of subdivision that focuses on active farmland as the premier amenity. Ag-based Land Development is not a new concept. This type of hamlet development is an Old World development pattern brought from Europe where homes are clustered, agricultural land is preserved and commercial services are walkable to residents.

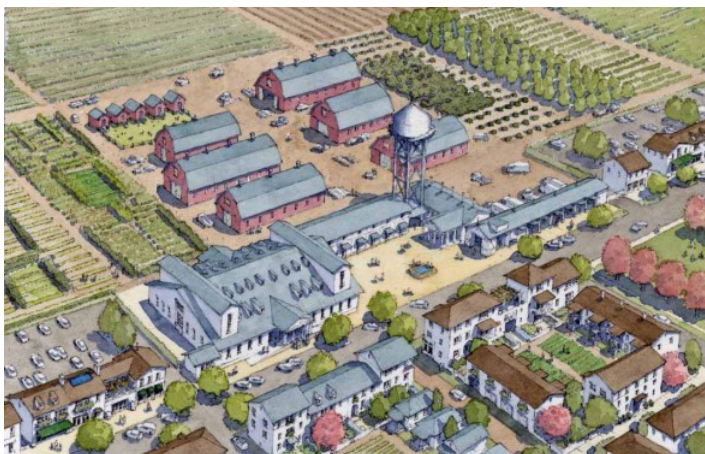
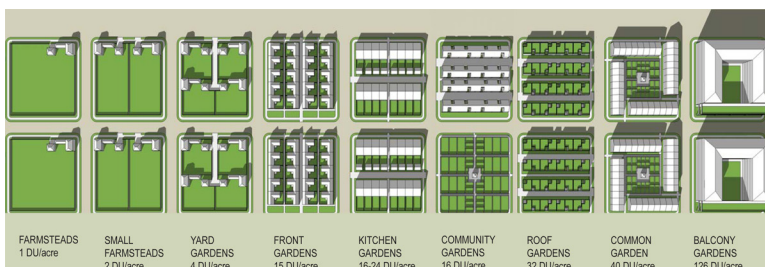
Development scholar at the Urban Land Institute, Ed McMahon stated that as of 2012 there are close to 200 such developments currently exist in the United States, and many are in planning or under development. The concept is simple: cluster homes; substitute a community garden in place of a large recreational amenity such as a golf course; and make the commercial services walkable to most residents. Nearly every US case has been examined for the Fields District Strategy and the three that are most relevant for Meridian are presented on this and the following pages.



### Recommendation #3. Grow Meridian Sustainably

**Recommendation 3A.** Use Fiscal Impact Modeling to promote sustainable land development practices.

- Consultants compared the Ag-based Land Development model to a traditional residential subdivision, based on the impact both developments would have on the city's budget over ten years. This fiscal impact analysis used per capita and per square foot values for local public expenditures and tax receipts for the different land uses represented in each model. See page 30 for details.
- The Ag-based Land Development model would contribute a much larger surplus to Meridian over ten years than a traditional development. The net present value of the **Ag-based Land Development surplus is \$623,635, compared to \$453,487 for the traditional development, an increase of almost 40%.**
- The Ag-based Land Development is a smart investment for the region: it preserves active farmland (30% of the total acreage), promotes housing market diversity, facilitates more walking and biking, and generates more value per acre for both developers and the city.
- The City should **perform and a City-wide Fiscal Impact Analysis** to analyze and determine if the current development pattern is the best policy for the city moving forward.
- The **Capital Improvements Plan should be modified based on the citywide fiscal analysis.** A



serious consideration should be given to whether

or

not the City should extend infrastructure to the South of let the southern region of the City continue to maintain its rural character with larger lot subdivisions.

- The City should continue to adhere to the City's 10-year and then Annual CIP. This will allow the City and staff to be more proactive with its investment, which will save the City and its taxpayers millions over a 10-year period.
- City should establish and maintain an approval, permit and utility outlay system that maintains to the City's Comprehensive Plan and Capital Improvements Plan.
- The City should actively market its green and sustainable initiatives including this Fields Initiative, and also the Water Reclamation project with the city's wastewater treatment facility.

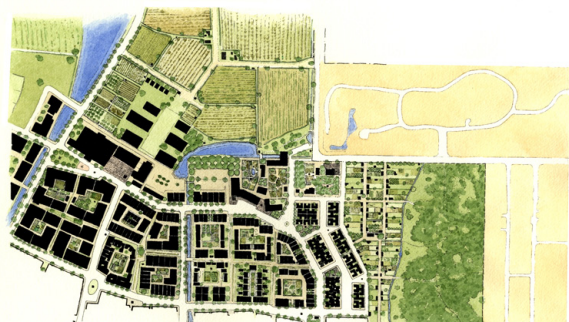
**Recommendation 3B.** Convene a stakeholders working group comprised of developers, landowners, planners, bankers brokers and builders.

- The City needs to lead this initiative with support from the County and other associations and appropriate stakeholder support.
- City should hold several in-house/staff only sessions with experts to determine how best Meridian can and should execute this concept.

**Illustrative examples of how to gradually integrate urbani and rural uses through a land development code that applies a "transect" model.**

**2 Left: General Transect Models**

**Below: Transect-based Land Plan for Southlands, Tsawwassen, BC, Canada**



Photos Source: DPZ.com



- Develop a true model for an Ag-based land development that addresses every aspect from the public and private side that can be identified.
- Create a presentation that clearly articulates the vision and the benefits
- Create an outreach strategy and “buzz” about this concept, before advertising a discussion or meeting about this concept. This can help developers see the buzz and interest among the community.
- Bring together interested parties to discuss the model that Meridian will be fostering, including: developers, landowners, planners, bankers, brokers, and builders.
- The goal is to educate, create excitement and generate marketing exposure regionally and nationally for what Meridian is trying to do

**Recommendation 3C.** Create a Land Use mechanism to foster Ag-based Real estate development(s)

- The current Future Land Use Map and Plan and Zoning Map and Plan may accommodate Ag-based development. An internal staff team should determine what changes (if any need to be made)
- If staff determines that current code may not accommodate this innovative development pattern, then the City should examine modifications would be necessary.
- Consideration to a form-based code should be given. If not for the whole City, form-based code could be a good mechanism for the Fields District. The form-based code will provide the predictable environment the community and the development community seek.
- Some of the ag-based development proposals may best be implemented through the use of a public-private finance mechanism called a Community Improvement District (CID), as was done in Boise with the Harris Ranch development.

**Recommendation 3D.** Work with a developer to create a Model Ag-based real estate development in Meridian

- Through the course of implementing 3A above, some developers will be more interested than others.
- Meridian should identify 1-2 developers who have the most interest and who have site control to



## Case Study: Prairie Crossing, IL

This is development located in a community located 40 miles from Chicago, IL. It is considered a “conservation community” where conservation easements were used to preserve a majority of the development’s acreage for existing farms, wetlands, and open space. From its inception, Prairie Crossing was envisioned as a place that captured “a sense of place.”

### Highlights

- o Total Acres: 667
- o 249 single family homes
- o All sold by 2010 at rates of 34% above AMV
- o Currently selling at 100% above AMV
- o 36 condos (finished and selling now)
- o Commercial: Station Square is a mixed use commuter rail station directly linking resident to the Chicago MSA
- o 100 acres of farmland
- o Byron Colby Barn used for community gatherings



Photo Source: ruralsociology.org

work with to create a model.

- Visit several of these Case Study sites together, visiting with the developers and the public entities involved.
- Learn from mistakes and successes
- Work with the developer(s) to create conceptual and then site plans for a model.
- Implement the development and perform evaluations and impact analyses throughout the project to determine the net impacts for future development concepts.





## Case Study: Agritopia, Gilbert, AZ

This is development located in a fast growing suburb southeast of Phoenix, Arizona. As suburban sprawl reached the area in the 1990s, developer Joe Johnson decided to opt for an incrementally grown ag-focused village.

### Highlights:

- o Total Acres: 160 acres
- o 452 single family homes (selling at 10%+ AMV)
- o 250 luxury apartments under construction
- o 15 acre organic farm
- o Commercial: 60,000 sf including
- o Very focused on community connectivity
- o Small lots, narrow road ways, rear parking allies front porches, and a community center.
- o Homes are customizable
- o Architectural forms are highly customizeable and range from craftsman bungalows to Spanish Eclectic and French Revival



Photo Source: agritopia.com



## Case Study: Bucking Horse, Fort Collins, CO

This is development located in a highly urbanized area designed with a “modern farmhouse aesthetic.” The project is guided by the principles of ag-heritage, healthy living, and a social connectivity.

From the developer: “We want to return to a time 50 years ago when there was a sense of community.” This idea goes right down to their design principles. While the architectural styles of the homes is very flexible, all homes will sit on smaller lots, have large front porches, and no privacy gates.

### Highlights

- o Total Acres: 240
- o 205 single family homes; 78 Townhomes; 300 condos & apartments
- o Anticipating sales at 20-25% above AMV
- o Currently selling at 100% above AMV
- o Commercial: 30,000 sf including 19,000 sf flex production building and 2,500 sf farm-to-table restaurant
- o 3.6 acre organic Community Supported-Agriculture Farm
- o 1,000 sf winery; a distillery and microbrewery are also planned
- o Rehabing dozens of existing structures and using old farm equipment as art installations through out the development.

Right:  
Restoration  
plans for  
farm-to-table  
Restaurant



Photo Source: BellissimoInc.com

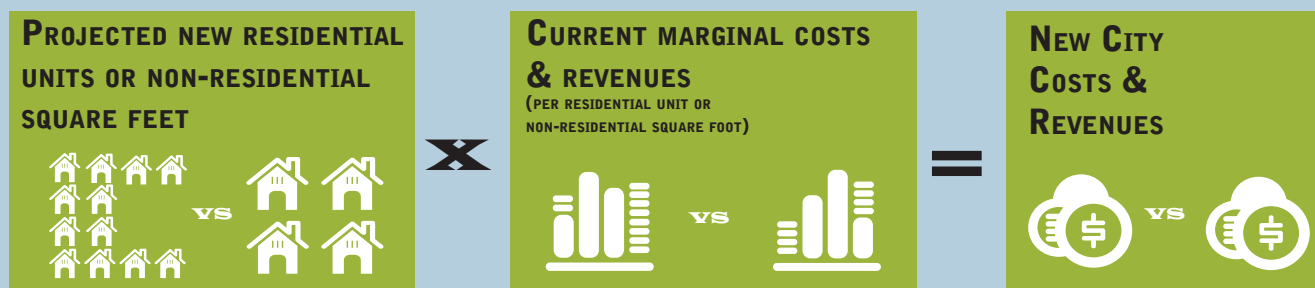
## Fiscal Impact Analysis of Development Types

Source: Anne Wescott, Idaho Smart Growth;  
Pegasus Planning and Development, June 2014

### Methodology

The fiscal impact model **estimates marginal costs and revenues** for the City's General Fund that would change as a result of a proposed development. The model applies them to projected new development scenarios on a per unit or per square foot basis, and compares them to estimated net new revenues. To the extent that actual revenues and expenditures vary from the estimates provided within these interviews, the results of the model will vary from reality. The model is designed to illustrate the potential fiscal impact of new development, but it is not anticipated that the impacts estimated in the model will precisely mirror those that actually occur.

Development scenarios that generate ongoing **surpluses** produce City revenues that exceed the costs of the services they require. These excess revenues could be used to offset deficits from other developments, to augment the City's fund balance, or to improve service standards. Development scenarios that produce ongoing **deficits** require service costs in excess of the revenues they generate. These deficits could be offset by surpluses from other developments, they could be mitigated out of fund balance, they could be mitigated by the developer, or they could require the City to decrease service levels.



### Assumptions

The calculations in the fiscal model are based on two sets of assumptions:

- Assumptions about the size, type and value of the proposed development to be analyzed by the model; and
- Assumptions about the service delivery patterns of City functions, including the expenditures that are variable in regards to growth and the types of development that cause increases in those expenditures.

### Development Assumptions

Two pieces of information are required about a projected development in order to calculate its likely fiscal impact:

- The development schedule for each projected residential unit type or non-residential land-use; and,
- The property value of each unit type or land-use.

The fiscal impact model for the proposed development scenarios is designed to assess the four land-use types proposed: residential, office, retail, and farmland development. The Development Land Use Assumptions chart summarizes the assumptions which we have used the fiscal model to analyze. This data can be modified to represent changes in land use assumptions in the proposed development, or land uses in any future development under consideration in the City of Meridian.

#### Residential\*

	New Units	Cost per unit
Single Family		
High Density	450	\$150,000
Moderate Density	250	\$180,000
Low Density	11	\$200,000
Multi-Family		
Townhomes	150	\$150,000
Apartments	150	\$150,000

#### Commercial\*

	Square Feet	Cost per sq ft
Office	80,000	\$220
Retail	70,000	\$220

#### Farm-related\*

	Acres	Cost per acre
Community-Supported (CSA)**	40	\$1,200
Incubator Farm	20	\$1,200
Working Farm	100	\$1,200

\* Costs absorbed equally over 10 years

\*\*Producing 1,011 CSA shares per year as well as produce to be sold at an on-property farm stand



## Fiscal Impact Analysis of Development Types

### Development Assumptions Continued

#### TRADITIONAL DEVELOPMENT SCENARIO



Photo Source: 24.media.tumblr.com

A traditional residential development is dominated by single-family housing with large lots, low street connectivity, and small amounts of green space. Commercial uses and green space are limited. Transportation is focused on automobiles, and neighborhood design limits the practicality of walking, biking, or using transit services. Large amounts of space are taken up for housing, putting development pressure on adjacent farmland.

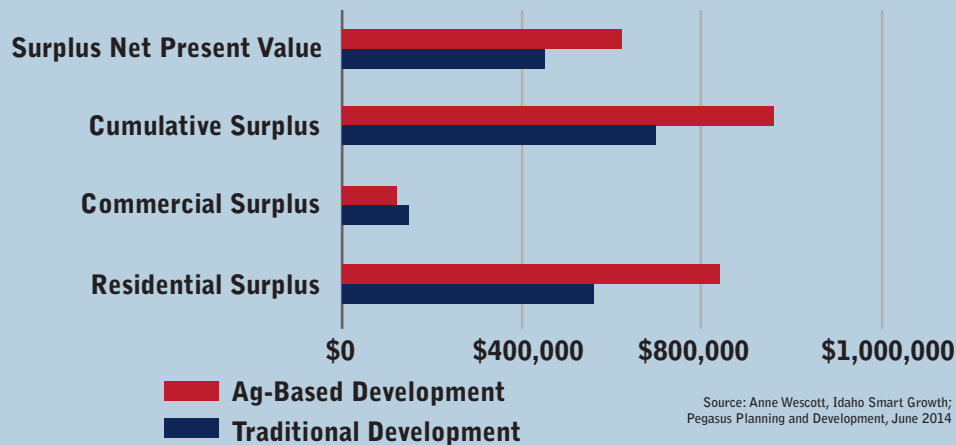
#### AG-FOCUSED REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT SCENARIO



Photo Source: rollins.edu

This type of development features a strong mix of commercial and agricultural uses. There is a greater diversity of housing types, including multiple sizes of single-family home and some apartments and townhomes near the development core. Retail and office space is integrated into urban design and helps create a distinct "center." Urban design makes it practical and enjoyable to walk, bike instead of rely exclusively on automobiles. Substantial farmland and greenspace are preserved, serving both local residents and commercial markets into perpetuity.

### Net Fiscal Impact: Traditional vs. Ag-Based Real Estate Development Scenarios



### Results

Two real estate development scenarios were considered in terms of their fiscal impact for the city of Meridian. One scenario is a conventional residential subdivision, comprised of moderate and low density single family housing. The second scenario is an ag-focused real estate development, designed according to best practices and based on case studies of existing communities around the country (in particular, in the West). These scenarios were analyzed in terms of the expenditures they require from Meridian city services, and the revenues they generate in local taxes. This fiscal modeling included review of city budgets, determination of fixed and variable costs for city departments, adjustments based on local property markets, and projection of tax value over a ten year period.

The results show a dramatic fiscal benefit to the ag-based real estate development scenario. Despite preserving a third of its land for agriculture and providing a host of amenity and health benefits, the ag-based real estate development generates over \$170,000 more net surplus than the traditional development scenario on the same acreage. This equates to a fiscal of almost 40% for the city of Meridian. This model demonstrates that ag-based real estate development is a smart development scenario for Meridian.



## Catalyst 4: Downtown Conference Center



### Related Findings

- Meridian lacks adequate conference space for large business in the area to hold educational workshops or annual meetings.
- Meridian lacks facilities adequate for meetings of local business and trade associations.
- There is little performance or concert space in Meridian despite its high growth rate and family focus.
- Meridian is losing these activities to Boise and other towns in the region.

### Context:

Essential to establishing a thriving visitor and tourism industry is sufficient and diverse types of meeting, conference and convention center space. Meridian should foster the creation of a new multi-use venue; and, ideally such a facility should be located in downtown Meridian. The center must provide for active public spaces. Developed using innovative mixed use concepts, such a facility also could include a residential component and companion retail space. Small shop-fronts can provide an affordable rent rate for local startups.

Meeting space is crucial to large firms and associations, as well as supporting the needs of community groups and local arts programs. Basic facilities available for businesses and organizations to hold trainings, meetings, or other events provide valuable flexible infrastructure to a community. Based on national norms, a moderately-sized city such as Meridian should have at least one event space capable of accommodating several hundred people.

A conference center located in downtown Meridian -- with event space and active daytime uses -- can serve a range of stakeholders in the community and allow the City to capture local and regional demand that currently is going elsewhere or is unmet. A conference and events center will help draw active users to the district and spill over into retail and service sales, while providing value to both large businesses and local civic organizations.

Cultural activities anchored by community event space allow a city to engage in import replacement of entertainment spending. This economic development technique, called "consumption base development," is particularly valuable for smaller cities and rural towns. Homegrown cultural activities encourage residents to spend entertainment dollars locally rather than travel outside the community. Arts and cultural-related spending tend to have a higher labor component than other industries; thus dollars that are spent on local arts tend to have higher multiplier effects in the local community. (see Markusen)

It is important to note that the Greater Boise Auditorium District has plans to double its convention center space, including addition of a ballroom and commercial kitchen. This is a plus for Meridian because it puts the Treasure Valley more firmly on the map for national conventions and larger scale events. Meridian then could capture new regional demand that is a spin-off from an expanded regional conference center. Competitive pricing may help to capture smaller conventions, drawing overnight visitors whose spending will add to the economy.

### Recommendation #4: Create a Downtown Conference Center to provide space for meetings, trainings, and performing arts

- o The City and the MDC should partner with a private entity to develop and manage a conference center in the downtown, based on needs of local







## Salem Convention Center Salem, OR

- o 30,000 sf of flex meeting space
- o Able to host groups from 10 to 1,500 attendees
- o 14 different meeting rooms
- o Adjoining 193-room Grant Hotel, Salem
- o Located in the heart of Downtown
- o Well-linked to area tourism promotion



Source: healthylivingandlightentertainment.com

businesses and the arts community. A vertical residential component could help the project be fiscally viable and add new housing types in the downtown area.

- o The center should be designed to accommodate performances and concerts, and other cultural and civic events for the Meridian community.
- o A downtown conference center overlaps with several other ED strategies:
  - Business Expansion: Provides facilities for peer-to-peer networking and training; other business events
  - Tourism: Potential for drawing state or regional conventions.
  - Strengthen Downtown: Adds a significant downtown amenity for both local residents and regional services.
  - Quality of Place: Provides space for art, culture, and civic events.
- o The conference center may be integrated in the development of mixed-use or transit-oriented development projects in the downtown.

**Recommendation 4A.** Coordinate conference center/performance space development with local public and private stakeholders.

- o Public-private partnerships may offer a viable means of developing a conference center. A large local company, Scentsy, is currently exploring the development of its own on-site conference facility. They should be brought into the facility-planning process to determine interest in coordinating a single shared conference facility in the downtown area.

**Recommendation 4B.** Conduct a feasibility study for conference center/performance space, identify appropriate sources of funds for center development, and build a conference center.

- o The city should undertake a study to determine hotel demand and access to the downtown and consider the feasibility of linking the proposed conference center to small hotel development.
- o Identify mechanisms to fund the development
- o Conference centers tend to be revenue neutral or negative, with boosted revenues coming from hotel sales and through broader support of the business ecosystem. This should be taken into account when considering financing and business



## Ki Convention Center Greenbay, WI

- o 45,000 sf of flex meeting space
- o Walking distance to downtown
- o Within walking distance to 500 overflow hotel rooms (including the Hyatt on Main)
- o On and off-site catering



Source: greenbaywi.gov

## Catalyst 5: Venture Meridian Campus



### Related Findings

- Small business assistance and entrepreneurship services are needed in Meridian
- Surveys and interviews state there is a hunger for more independent businesses and local alternatives to chain retail
- Technological advancement in many target industries will warrant new businesses, services, and products that existing businesses struggle to create internally. Servicing the growing and increasingly advanced supply chain is a major opportunity for new business creation at a Venture Campus.
- BSU is a leading institution in the State for building entrepreneurship infrastructure from the ground up, from ideation to angel investment and commercialization.

### Context:

While attracting outside businesses remains an important component of any regional economic development strategy, cultivating homegrown entrepreneurs through “economic gardening” is now universally recognized as an essential foundation for long-term, sustainable growth. Interviews and surveys with Meridian companies and civic leaders indicate there is a need to improve support for smaller businesses and start-ups in the area. Coupled with the workforce and talent development strategy, initiatives to strengthen Meridian’s entrepreneurial ecosystem can help the City tap into the tremendous opportunities for developing start-ups and promoting business innovation being generated by the region’s major information technology companies and by the strong programs in Computer Science and other high technology fields at Boise State University (BSU).

Indeed, Boise State University already is operating a highly successful business incubator in the region and has launched an innovative “accelerator” program for its students that it has considered replicating at various locations around the region. For this project, BSU would be a strong candidate with which to partner in developing new entrepreneurial initiatives in Meridian. Regional models such as The Watercooler and others would be helpful models to consider emulating, as well. These types of programs can offer experienced staff help to access mentors who can assist innovators and entrepreneurs in formulating their ideas and business plans based on best practices for launching a successful venture. They can also

provide a safer, standardized pipeline between area angel investors and start-ups. This catalyst project should be nurtured as other parts of the innovation ecosystem (see strategy 1) take shape over the course of the five year strategic plan.

### **Recommendation #5: Develop a Venture Meridian Campus to promote and anchor local entrepreneurship.**

**Recommendation 5A.** Have the city’s existing Small Business Coordinator (Community Development Department), Meridian Development Corporation, and Chamber of Commerce assist in the relocation of businesses in the Vila Consultants Building at 33 E Idaho Ave into new office spaces throughout the Downtown.

- Given that their existing clientele is already accustomed to coming downtown to use their services, it is wise to try and keep them centrally located. These existing businesses would all be good candidates for generating downtown daytime activity.

**Recommendation 5B.** Lease the space to a leading entity, such as BSU or The Water Cooler, for the creation of a new Venture and Start-up campus for local residents of all ages.

- BSU’s Venture College is a key model to consider implementing the community. They are currently targeting enrolled students, but they have noted their program is something that is transferable to a community-based model as opposed to their current campus-based model.



- The campus will ideally feature start-up training and business management skill mastery courses available for audit by the broader business community.

**Recommendation 5C.** Partner with the lead entity to find new local Angel investors to have local representation on the Angel Investment Advisory team

- This investment could overlap with target industries or training needs identified by the Talent Development-Industry Partnership entity created for the Ag-Innovation Campus.

**Recommendation #5D:** Lead efforts to provide an abundance of opportunities for start-ups, the existing business community, and consumers to interact, collaborate and innovate.

- This could take shape in the form of featured events, providing more meeting places and building a thriving café culture in the Downtown.
- Pop-up events could also be a cost effective way to draw interest into the downtown area and help existing retailers. Examples include Viva Streets, pop-up putt-putt and temporary parklets.

**Recommendation #5E:** Assist in connecting the Venture campus and entrepreneurs to funding sources at the Department of Labor, Idaho Tech Council, and the Idaho Small Business Development Council.



## Student Experience at BSU Venture College

1. Content delivered on demand and just in time through digital and traditional learning media.
2. Experience through internships, teamwork, realistic learning exercises, and engaging the outside world including potential customers and resource partners.
3. Mentorship as each student will have an individual coach matched to the student's interests and drawn from the local business community.
4. Resources to support the founding efforts for those who choose to launch while at school or shortly after graduation.
5. Competition for those resources based upon external evaluation.
6. Collaboration among the cohorts of students.
7. The building of personal Networks so vital to the success of new ventures.



## STRATEGIES FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The following six general strategies provide a programmatic context for deployment of catalyst projects, as well as other economic development policies and initiatives. They provide a general framework for moving forward and tying Meridian's future to core foundations of economic growth and resilience. The Catalyst projects are folded into these six strategies:

# Strategy 1: Talent & Innovation Ecosystem Cultivation

### Key Catalyst Projects:

- o Ag Innovation Campus
- o Venture Meridian Campus

### Context:

An innovative community builds institutions and cultivates a culture open to and supportive of experimentation, education and skills development, and new concepts and techniques. This type of high-growth climate cannot be developed ad hoc; rather, it depends on a long-term process of investing in human capital and relationships. An economically vibrant community depends on an ecosystem of agents and organizations, working towards incremental improvement of the local business climate.

The first rung on the ladder of resilient local growth is the cultivation and retention of high-skill, talented workers in a range of technical and managerial fields. The talent development sphere is the engine for deepening skills specialization and industry advancement. As the skilled workforce and entrepreneurial communities grow, with constant cooperation with established companies, local investment will increase. This provides the base necessary for industry growth, research and development, and technology commercialization that yields major growth in high-quality jobs.

The first step on this path to substantial industry development is the cultivation of a pool of workers matching the skill sets demanded by regional industry, and tying that pool to entrepreneurial programs industry targeting initiatives.

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that pool to entrepreneurial programs industry targeting initiatives.

### Strategic Recommendation #1: Establish a Talent Development-Industry Partnership initiative

**Recommendation 1A.** Implement Catalyst Initiatives to provide infrastructure for talent and entrepreneurs. Promote these institutions as beacons of Meridian's entrepreneurial spirit.

**Recommendation 1B.** Provide targeted assistance to specialized firms in target industries who might be interested in cultivating entrepreneurs or "intra-pre-neurs" to service their ancillary or supply-chain needs.

**Recommendation 1C.** Feature local start-ups in marketing pieces for the city.

**Recommendation 1D.** Provide opportunities for entrepreneurs and start-ups to pitch concepts in public, interactive settings such as "5 minute pitch" showcases,

*The world is rapidly changing. Nothing is as it was 10 years ago, and we can only imagine what will be in 10 years and that includes changing economic conditions. This means the economic development field needs to consider new economic development tools to deal with a new reality. One of those tools is the Do-It-Yourself Economy, an economy built on a foundation of small, locally-owned, diverse businesses.*

**The International Economic Development Council, 2014**





or “Meet the Start-up” events for youth groups. Invite similar entrepreneurs from around the area to present opportunities for interaction and continued innovation.

**Recommendation 1E.** Track talent development-industry partnerships with strong data sharing to establish alumni networks to track talent for retention and attraction.

**Recommendation 1F.** Maintain close connections with all sides of the partnership to plan for necessary expansion or additional infrastructure and funding needs.

**Recommendation 1G.** Track state and national spending for workforce and entrepreneurship programs and provide evidence of City support in grant applications.

**Recommendation 1H.** Encourage at-risk youth to join vocational training programs or internships at an early age. Some schools speak to students of these opportunities as early as the 5th grade.

### Role of the City:

The City of Meridian should be a leading partner in organizing and implementing the two key catalyst projects related to this strategy, along lines described in those sections.

## Strategy 2: Business Expansion



### Related Findings

- Online survey results: business expansion, small business assistance and entrepreneurship services are top biggest needs (in addition to Downtown)
- Basic population increase is a major economic driver, leading to strengths in professional and financial services
- There is a need among the business community for development assistance
- Several core industries demonstrate both national and regional strength, and serve as appropriate targets for promotion and development: these are focused around medical industries, business and scientific services, and production and distribution related to agricultural products

### Key Catalyst Projects:

- o Ag-Focused Talent and Innovation Center
- o Downtown Conference Center
- o Venture Meridian Complex

### Context:

Business retention, development, and attraction are the prime movers of local economic development. Local government action can reduce structural barriers for new business development and growth, and promote the synergies that lead to positive externalities for local business growth. While attracting larger firms is a key element of business expansion strategies, most new jobs are created by small businesses. Small business support and development services are important elements in a thriving business ecosystem.

Most long-term job growth in the United States comes from a relatively small set of high-impact companies. These firms are characterized by doubling their revenue and employment in 4 years, and are found at all sizes and across all industries. They are 25 years old on average, with 95% of high-impact firms over 5 years of age. They contribute almost all the private sector employment growth in the US. Companies that are high performing can be identified with local knowledge of the business ecosystem. These firms are more suited to strong expansion, and should be targeted for programs to determine barriers or impediments to their growth.

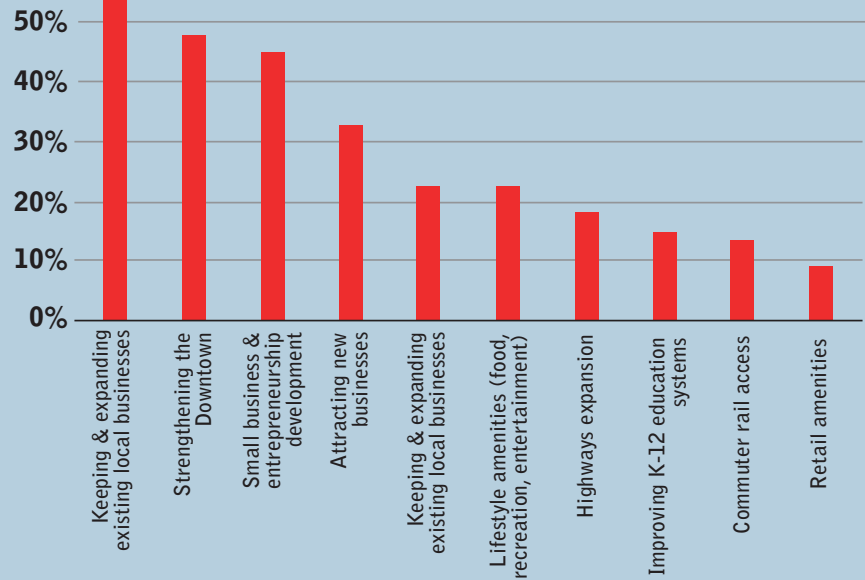
Business attraction targets should contribute to the development of clusters that provide key benefits to the community (high wages, expanded tax base, etc.). Cluster based development allows communities to draw

## Related Findings

### Meridian Business Owner Survey

Conducted Summer 2014  
114 Complete Responses

**Question:**  
“What should be the main focus areas (choose 3) for economic development in Meridian?”



on the positive externalities that come from businesses in similar or complementary industries located in close proximity. This includes opportunities for collaborative research and development and the cultivation of a high-quality, specialized market for labor and business services. Clusters appropriate to the Meridian area include the following: agribusiness/food production and processing/agricultural research and development; health care; and professional services.

Small businesses are the lifeblood of the American economy, providing 66% of net new jobs since the 1970s. Meridian has a strong small business community, but lacks any substantial programming for development or technical support. Meridian's high rate of population growth creates an environment suitable for goods and services focused on residents. These include professional and personal services, medical services, food and beverage establishments, and home-oriented retail. These industries are well suited to small business entrepreneurship and growth.

Target industries include sectors that are appropriate for small business development, including professional and business services, some medical development, and personal services. Other target industries with larger firms may function as anchors for purchasing goods or services from small firms in the area. Some targeted industries also contribute to the development of districts that support firms of a range of

sizes, including small offices; medical industry development is a good example of this.

**Strategic Recommendation #2: Expand and enhance a range of business development strategies based on Peer-based Retention, Attraction and Mentoring programs, and proactive small business support and import replacement tied to strong local industry targets.**

**Recommendation 2A.** The City of Meridian Economic Development staff should lead the development of a Business Retention and Expansion team, with support from the Chamber of Commerce. These efforts will be led by the Economic Development Coordinator. They will determine key members from the local business community and undertake proactive efforts to approach local businesses and help them resolve barriers to sustainable growth. This effort will require assistance outside of permitting and will include: technical assistance and training; assistance with sourcing capital; where appropriate, building up and promoting growth in an industry's supply chain for more local growth.

**Recommendation 2B.** The City should add one additional full-time staff person assigned for administrating special projects laid out in this report and to assist in coordination of business expansion efforts. Because the Economic Development Department will be taking on additional responsibilities and



implementing five complex projects and signature initiatives. The City of Meridian has many diverse businesses, and coordination and administration of expansion efforts must be improved to meet all of the demand for growth assistance. The City should be seen as a conduit for growth, not a barrier to it.

**Recommendation 2C.** Some of the largest employers in Meridian are homegrown, with strong commitments to the City. The City should continue to work with them to insure basic infrastructural and workforce needs are met.

**Recommendation 2D.** Meridian should continue to cultivate, define, and empower its “Business Ready-Team” with a coherent message for companies considering locating to Meridian.

**Recommendation 2E.** The Chamber of Commerce should support small business development through peer-to-peer trainings, mentoring, information exchange, and networking events. It should focus on industries that serve its rapidly growing population and/or complement industries targeted to be ripe for continued growth when appropriate.

**Recommendation 2F.** The Chamber of Commerce should offer member-exclusive advertising services on its website and through other media.

**Recommendation 2G.** The City should encourage the Chamber to lead small business support services, while supporting the business community through developing a “one-stop shop” to assist firms in navigating regulations and codes and identifying potential sources of public funding or procurement opportunities. It should also support infrastructure projects that support entrepreneurship and the small business community, such as the catalyst projects identified in this report.

**Recommendation 2H.** Implement the Catalyst projects

**Recommendation 2I.** Initiate a “Made in Meridian” campaign

- Meridian can encourage residents to “buy local” through basic branding and promotions, including “buy local” days.
- The campaign can grow to promote local goods and services outside Meridian itself, with branding targeted to larger regions. This should focus on industry specializations tied to Meridian’s core industries, including food and farm related products.
- Many cities and states develop focused programs to encourage local firms to source goods and services from other local firms. This involves more focused efforts to map out the supply chains of local companies, and identify supplies and inputs that could be provided by other companies in the region. This supply chain replacement tactic offers strong potential for furthering a resilient local economy.

### Role of City:

The City of Meridian should lead in business retention and attraction programs, including the development of a retention and attraction committee and the addition of a staff person for special projects in Economic Development.

The City should support the Chamber’s efforts for small business technical support services and assistance in sourcing financing, while it takes a lead in implementing catalyst projects in infrastructure and workforce development that further small business development.

## Strategy 3: Tourism



### Related Findings

- Agritourism, nature tourism and heritage tourism are the fastest growing tourism segments in the US.
- Meridian is in one of the nation's fastest growing wine regions.
- Several Scenic Byways lie just outside Meridian, and are not connected to each other.
- Highway 16 could serve as the connection to the Scenic Byways tours.
- A special convention center tax district exists for Boise, and extends to the East side of Eagle Road.
- There is insufficient meeting and conference space in Meridian.
- Downtown Boise is about to expand their Convention Center space.
- Most public-funded convention or conference centers remain in need of constant subsidy
- A Public-private conference center may be a more viable option for Meridian.

### Key Catalyst Projects:

- o Downtown Conference Center
- o Ag-Experience Center

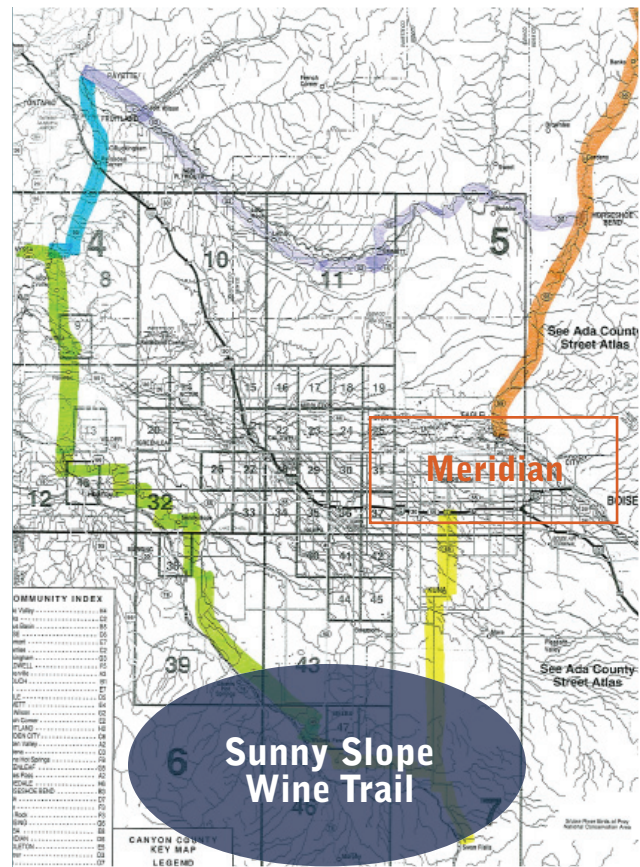
### Context:

Tourism is a segment of the economy in Meridian that has not grown, due largely to there not being any real tourism assets in Meridian, besides local community parks, downtown and retail.

However, Meridian is also in the middle of a very rich tourism region, with vineyards, skiing, hiking, downtown Boise, and many other tourist assets all just outside of Meridian.

Meridian should position itself as the launching point for experiencing tourism in the region. To do this, Meridian will need to develop more tourism assets locally, develop a public relations and marketing campaign on tourism and build more infrastructure including the Scenic Byways connection and an Ag Tourism Center.

If followed, these strategies will help to diversify the economy of Meridian, provide more for residents to do, and bring more external dollars into Meridian little.



Source: Idaho Rural Development

Meridian is a missing link in a connected ring of 4 regional byways including the Lower Payette River Heritage Byway, Snake River Canyon Byway, and the Western Heritage Historic Byway, among others located throughout Southwest Idaho. The highway 16 expansion could overlap with this effort to boost tourism to these amenities.

Go to [VisitIdaho.org](http://VisitIdaho.org) for more information.





### **Strategic Recommendation #3: Adopt Tourism as an industry segment to grow in Meridian**

**Recommendation 3A.** Convene a meeting with the Chamber of Commerce leadership and Meridian to discuss a Tourism Strategy.

**Recommendation 3B.** Develop a Tourism Strategy

**Recommendation 3C.** Convene a meeting with State and Local tourism experts to discuss Meridian's tourism goals

**Recommendation 3D.** Implement the Catalyst Projects.

**Recommendation 3E.** Determine if a special assessment district or tax is appropriate for Meridian to create and use for tourism efforts.

**Recommendation 3F.** Develop marketing collateral that is focused on specific target markets for tourism.

**Recommendation 3G.** Convene a Scenic Byways meeting with all those involved (state, regional, public, private) to determine how to better coordinate and market the Scenic Byways, and if there is a role for Meridian.

**Recommendation 3H.** Advocate for Highway 16 to be the Scenic Byways connector.

### **Role of the City:**

The City of Meridian should be a leading partner in organizing and implementing the two key catalyst projects related to this strategy, along lines described in this section. The Chamber of Commerce should lead most tourism initiatives for Meridian, and be supported as appropriate.

## Strategy 4: Land Use, Transportation, and Infrastructure



### Related Findings

- Meridian land prices, and consequently the building lease prices are high in the Boise-Meridian-Nampa region.
- Water scarcity in Idaho has impacted water laws, including irrigation and canal districts, both of which are very relevant to the Fields District.
- Meridian has a state of the art water reclamation program at their wastewater treatment center.
- Byproducts (including free commercial water) from this water reclamation system should be seen as economic development tools for the City.
- Congestion on I-84 during rush hours (am/pm) have steadily worsened.
- Transportation solutions identified include: Highway 16, Regional Commuter Rail, Bicycle Lanes, and Denser Development.
- Meridian has a good bicycle lane improvement program.
- Development patterns of sprawl that Meridian has largely experienced are not fiscally sustainable.

### Key Catalyst Projects:

- o Ag Heritage Center
- o Ag-focused Real Estate Development
- o Coordinated Land Use, Transportation and Infrastructure Policies

### Context:

For businesses and site selectors, inexpensive utilities and inexpensive yet well-located land and buildings are major priorities--second only to quality workforce. Connectivity and efficient/predictable transportation systems are essential for a region's labor force, businesses, and logistics operators. Meridian does fairly well in this category because it is in an ideal location for economic development: part of the state's largest major metropolitan area; along an interstate; and with lots of land to grow.

Much of the vacant land in Meridian is either about to be developed or still being farmed, but more than likely to be developed in 10-20 years. Land prices in Meridian are just under those of Boise, but higher than Nampa and Caldwell. There are relatively few locations for industrial development in Meridian and the land is expensive for that use. However, office development, retail, light industrial and some warehousing/mixed-use will continue to be strong markets for Meridian.

Meridian and the Boise have tremendous growth pressures on their land, water and wastewater resources. This growth is also evident during the morning and afternoon hours as commuters flow in/out of Boise from other fast-growing communities.

State and local entities have created a vision for a regional commuter rail system, which would utilize the existing Union Pacific rail line to connect suburbs to Boise downtown. A well designed public realm with the use of connectivity promotes alternative transportation choice. One of the major decisions the creative class look for in choosing a place to live is the availability to alternative transportation. Meridian can be the leading city the region with appropriate investment in land use policy and transportation infrastructure. The State and regional stakeholders have also identified Highway 16 as a new highway that would alleviate some of the regional traffic. This new highway would roughly run on top of the existing McDermott Road in Meridian – passing north-south through the Fields District area.

Chinden Boulevard (or 20/26) should also be expanded. Chinden, or 20/26, should also be widened to have four lanes with a center turn lane, bicycle lanes, and sidewalks.

**Strategic Recommendation 4: Integrate Sustainable Land Use practices with Transportation Improvements and Infrastructure Investments.**

**Recommendation 4A.** City staff should convene an internal discussion about this Strategy. The goal of the discussion should be to develop specific internal processes that will need to be further developed and approved before implementing.





Planned extension of Highway 16 along  
McDermott Rd, Meridian

Source: Idaho Department of Transportation

**Recommendation 4B.** Implement the Ag-Heritage and Ag-Focused Real Estate Catalyst projects

**Recommendation 4C.** The City should perform a **City-wide Fiscal Impact Analysis** to analyze and determine if the current development pattern is the best policy for the city moving forward.

**Recommendation 4D.** The **Capital Improvements Plan** should be modified based on the citywide fiscal analysis. A serious consideration should be given to whether or not the City should extend infrastructure to the South or let the southern region of the City continue to maintain its rural character with larger lot subdivisions.

**Recommendation 4E.** The City Council should maintain to the City's 10-year and then Annual CIP. This will allow the City and Staff to be proactive with its investment, which will save the City and its taxpayers millions over a 10-year period.

**Recommendation 4F.** City should establish and maintain an approval, permit and utility outlay system that maintains to the City's Comprehensive Plan and Capital Improvements Plan.

**Recommendation 4G.** The City should actively market its green and sustainable initiatives including this Fields Initiative, and also the Water Reclamation project with the city's wastewater treatment facility.

**Recommendation 4H.** Aggressively implement the bicycle program, in collaboration with Meridian's transportation partners.

**Recommendation 4I.** Engage, or re-energize the discussion in the region for Regional Commuter Rail.

**Recommendation 4J.** Implement the Regional Commuter Rail.

- Preserve a station platform at the downtown location in Meridian for the Regional Commuter Rail.
- Consider a second Commuter Rail Station platform at the 10-Mile Area.
- Identify a potential joint bus network with the university.

**Recommendation 4K.** Continue to utilize the City's wastewater by-products as economic development tools.

**Recommendation 4L.** Develop an incentive policy utilizing the wastewater by-products as economic development incentives.

**Recommendation 4M.** Complete the Chinden improvements by widening Highways 20 and Highways 26.

**Recommendation 4N.** Complete Highway 16.

- Continue to Work with other communities in the Region, and the State, to push this project forward and secure funding (whether that is just public or utilizing innovative public-private tools).
- Work to access ramps so as to preserve larger tracts of land, and increase traffic flow on Highway 16.
- Secure federal and foundation funding to develop Ag-Heritage Center along Highway 16
- Push forward the notion (along with regional partners – see "Tourism" section) that Highway 16 should be the continuation of the Scenic Byways – thus connecting the many disparate yet existing Scenic Byways in the region.

## Role of the City

The City of Meridian should be a leading partner in organizing and implementing the two key catalyst projects related to this strategy. Recognizing the limitations of authority in Idaho, Meridian does not control the roads or rail. Water and wastewater through annexation are the City's main carrots to use in growth management. Implement an involuntary annexation strategy as part of a targeted development strategy in areas where infrastructure exists. By adhering to a fiscal tool-based planning, capital improvements and utility outlay/extension policy, Meridian can grow into the remainder areas of Ada County in a sustainable manner that is proactive, thoughtful and smart policy for the City and its taxpayers.

That being said, the City should also continue to play a strong advocate role regionally and at the State for the Commuter Rail Highway 16 and 20/26 (or Chinden) improvements, and continue to partner with regional and location transportation providers.

## Strategy 5: Strengthen Downtown



### Related Findings

- Online survey results: business community finds this to be a preeminent challenge but a very important priority for ED.
- Aside from The Village, poor options for clusters of 3rd spaces and amenities for younger people.
- The city has invested heavily in quality Downtown street improvements, need to leverage those and ongoing activities.
- Should transit/light rail become an option, Downtown will warrant a stop and increasing density around the stop will improve quality of life and ROI on the investment.

### Key Catalyst Projects:

- o Downtown Conference Center
- o Venture Meridian Campus

### Context:

Downtown is the key hub for quality of place. It is the heart of a community – it represents both heritage and new local alternatives. Downtowns are typically the city's civic center and house community services, connecting them to every resident. A vibrant downtown—or the lack of one—affects the community's ability to attract and retain residents, businesses and institutions, jobs, and investment that enable a town to endure and thrive.

Downtowns generally have the skeleton of strong urban design, accommodating a range of business and residential scales and types. They are typically walkable, bikeable, and accessible to a diversity of people. It is important that Downtowns offer a range of amenities and characteristics attractive to the diversity of needs and tastes in their communities. Street life should be active, vibrant, accessible, and multigenerational, and otherwise representative of the city as a whole.

Meridian has made Downtown as a priority area for the city's economic future. This set of recommendations will serve to refine and articulate avenues for Downtown investment that optimize the quality of interventions without demanding excessive quantity of intervention.

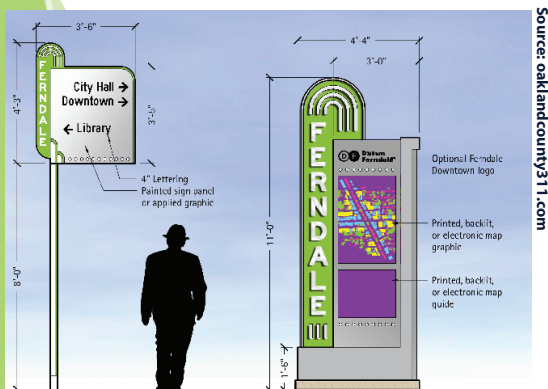
**Strategic Recommendation #5: Undertake a range of interventions to enhance the urban amenities of Downtown Meridian for residents, workers companies, and tourists.**

**Recommendation 5A.** Work with the Meridian Development Corporation (MDC) to clarify their role in Economic Development.

- The MDC's role on managing the Urban Renewal District and corresponding TIF financing makes them a key entity for partnering in the city's economic development efforts.
- The Urban Renewal District should be leveraged for greater overall impact within the Downtown and for the City writ large.
- Consider the expansion of urban renewal and TIF financing by the strategic addition of one or more new urban renewal districts, particularly with the new districts would provide incentives for business recruitment.

**Recommendation 5B.** Make Quality of Place a guiding light for all aesthetic and structural improvements to the downtown

- Quality of Place is a city-wide strategy with



Source: oaklandcounty311.com

Historic Radio City Wayfinding scheme,  
Ferndale, CA



specific implications for the Downtown. Downtown should be a place of unique landmarks, iconic spaces and restaurants, the uniqueness and character of a community.

- Develop distinct, creative markers in Meridian's eminent wayfinding initiative, utilized in the Downtown as well as other major community nodes. Draw passersby to unique spaces and major landmarks.

**Recommendation 5C.** Increase Employment in the Downtown by leveraging City-owned properties

- Establish the BSU Venture Meridian Center in the Downtown and integrate it into the streetscape and wayfinding.
- Support relocation of existing small businesses into new buildings and facilities in the downtown.
- Develop a small business coworking space with small offices, floating desk space, shared conference/kitchen/common spaces.
- Emphasize the city's appreciation for its independent businesses.

**Recommendation 5D.** Increase recreation, entertainment, and dining options in the Downtown.

- Undertake blight removal for downtown blocks. Consider changing grant programs for façade improvements to loan deals structured with community lenders to accommodate larger structural improvement grants.
- Cultivate "third spaces" in the Downtown area that facilitate collaborative work (Examples: coffee shops, brewpubs).
- Host downtown events, including consistent weekly summer programming. (Examples: live music from a variety of styles).
- Develop a regular farmers market or artisans market in the Downtown, or explore potential of moving Village farmers market to the Downtown.

**Recommendation 5E.** Increase livability of the Downtown

- Work to stabilize neighborhoods adjacent to the Downtown. Examine HUD's Neighborhood stabilization program which provides funding and resources for this type of stabilization effort.
- Promote the development of condos, lofts, live-

work establishments, and mixed-use development through zoning and investment support.

- Connect downtown Main Street to immediately surrounding neighborhoods through streetscape and infrastructure improvements.
- Small investments in public art would have dramatic improvements on local feel of the community.

**Recommendation 5E.** Improve Downtown transportation & connectivity

- Increase focus on implementation of the city's bike plan, and develop supportive programs and education. Programs may include a bike-share similar to Boise's. Education may include bike-focused events such as city-biking days, bike-to-work days, weekly social rides, and races.
- Connect Downtown to area nodes and regional trails via bike lanes. Connect the Village to Downtown via Pine Street. Encourage the use of regional trails for bike commuting.
- If connection to commuter rail transit is feasible, plan for a major stop to be in the Downtown.

**Role of the City:**

The City of Meridian will assist in strengthening the MDC's implementation strategy.

Active streets and Downtown cafe culture, Columbia, MI



Source: Missouri.edu



## Strategy 6: Strengthen Quality of Place



### Related Findings

- Surveys and interviews indicate there is an interest in a greater diversity of entertainment options and independent businesses.
- There is low street-life activity and daytime population in Meridian's most walkable areas, particularly the downtown.
- Visitors find it difficult to navigate the city due to a lack of landmarks commercial space focused along highways.
- There are insufficient walkable areas in Meridian. According to WalkScore.com - an organization who tracks walkability of cities of all sizes across the US - Meridian's Walk Score is only 21 on a scale of 0-100 (least to most walkable). *Boise = 55; Nampa = 26; Caldwell = 23; Salt Lake = 55; Bellvue, WA = 38; Beaverton, OR = 55*

### Key Catalyst Projects:

- o Ag-based Real Estate Development
- o Ag-Experience Center

### Context:

Placemaking increases a city's overall competitiveness – it's about creating the right environment for the talent pool of today and tomorrow. Quality of Place is distinct from Quality of Life, a major strength for Meridian. It means a city promotes a diversity of options for its community to enjoy a stimulating setting, diverse people, and vibrant, visible street life. Many communities focus on their attributes for living and for working, but Quality of Place includes a focus on access to "Third Spaces" or places outside of work or home that involve recreation, engagement, aesthetics and play. Typically Quality of Place is built over time, a tightly woven fabric constructed incrementally.

Richard Florida describes (ULI) 3 Dimensions of Quality of Place:

- (1) What's there, or the coherence and quality of the built and natural environment,
- (2) Who's there, people of diverse national, ethnic, religious backgrounds or sexual and gender identities,
- (3) What's going on, or a visible presence of people interacting with the environment in a number of modes and a places. Quality of Place refers to the history and culture of a geography while encouraging new development that builds on that authentic heritage.

**Strategic Recommendation 6: Promote Quality of Place through arts and entertainment programs, wayfinding and signage, and streetscape improvements that draw upon Meridian's agricultural heritage.**

**Recommendation 6A.** Provide a greater variety of entertainment venues and events in walkable areas.

- Tactical Urbanism: Begin with temporary and pop-up initiatives such as a Better Block Program (<http://betterblock.org/>) that could lead to more permanent changes to the built environment. Focus on placing them in areas that are pedestrian and bike friendly and close to or in Downtown.

**Recommendation 6B.** Host more city-wide events (street fairs, music festivals, local vendor exhibitions) at a variety of times and with vendors, live music, and amenities that cater to a diversity of residents and visitors.

*The "Better Block" project is a demonstration tool that rebuilds an area using grassroots efforts to show the potential to create a great walkable, vibrant neighborhood center. The project acts as a living charrette so that communities can actively engage in the "complete streets" buildout process and develop pop-up businesses to show the potential for revitalized economic activity in an area.*

**BetterBlock.org**





**Recommendation 6C.** Launch an Art in Public Places program.

- Build upon existing efforts of the city to place statues in public square. Art in Public Places is a concept that encourages the blending of the arts into the urban fabric rather than standing out as a feature. Iconic statues in plazas and at terminal views are important, but we recommend more interactive pieces where the public can engage with them.
- Invite artists to create pieces (in a variety of media from painting to sculpture with reclaimed materials) in or on existing space in the public realm, such as in parks, on utility boxes, benches, street lamps, or building facades. These should be created on a rolling basis so that the space is constantly interactive, appealing, and inspiring.
- The Meridian Mill (next to City Hall) would be an excellent opportunity to utilize a well-placed, iconic landmark for placement of art or signage that informs people they are in the heart of the city.

Source: artinpublicplaces.org



Bench piece, Bend, OR

Source: eugene-or.gov



Art the Box, Eugene, OR

Jeremy Tamanini, Talent Attraction Manager for the Nordic Cities and Regions project, was recently sent to study the City of Austin and what the city was doing to attract and retain talent in the area. Tamanini stated the city's #1 economic development initiative is what he calls the "talent portal and branding" boon of the South by Southwest (SXSW) Festival that he states "operates as a more loosely organized talent attraction mechanism through the myriad connections it forges between local start-ups and external talent." It allows people to familiarize themselves with "the spirit of Austin, often revealing an unexpected appeal to outside visitors from larger US cities...who return to their hometowns [to operate] as real-time human publicity for the city."

**Recommendation 6D.** Ensure authentic, place-based design of city Wayfinding and signage

- Create a Citizens Advisory Committee with a diverse representation (age, sex, nation of origin, religion, lifestyle, term of residency) to assist with deciding final design elements that speak the city's character or that create a sense of place.
- Signage should direct people to the Downtown.

**Recommendation 6E:** Improve the city's Walkability: the most walkable areas are the downtown and the Village, however these are walkable islands in an overall car-dependent city.

- Use Main Street as the trunk of connected pathways expansion. Main Street has excellent amenities, but east-west corridors have excellent heritage structures for reinvestment.
- Design from the user's experience so that more space is utilized, connections are intuitive, and the pedestrian perspective is prioritized.

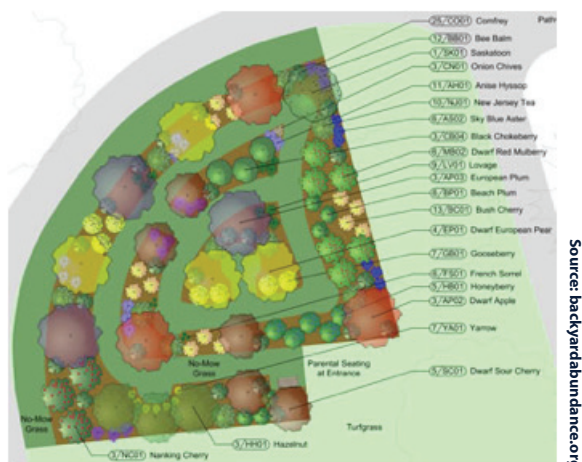
**Recommendation 6F.** Integrate the community's agricultural heritage into the public realm in creative, interactive ways. This will integrate well into agritourism development.

- Incorporate fruit and nut trees into street tree programs. (Ex.: a volunteer-led initiative that led to the planting of 10 unique street trees)
- Develop edible landscaping and community orchards within public parks

## Role of City:

The City of Meridian should be the torch bearer for quality of place in any intervention that affects how Meridian's character is being portrayed and always advocate for authenticity, character, and inclusiveness.

## Wetherby, Iowa Edible Forest, San Diego, CA



Source: backyardabundance.org

Source: latimes.com



Sour Orange Row,  
San Diego, CA



# Next Steps

The Economic Development Audit revealed that Meridian has done an excellent job laying the groundwork for economic development success. The healthcare, retail and office development that has proliferated in Meridian - just in the last five years – is growth that any city would like to have. Yet, the Audit also revealed that there is a lack of economic diversity and that Meridian can definitely put in place several strategies to increase that diversity and chart a path for a sustained pattern of growth.

The Fields District is a plan that now enters a Phase 3 of refined planning and implementation. The Economic Development Strategy is an initial strategy that sets the course for Meridian's economic development efforts, yet there are still several areas that will need to be further refined. Integrating all of the Fields District strategies into this Economic Development Strategy yields one Implementation Plan for Meridian to follow.

Both the Fields District and Economic Development Strategy are ambitious, and once implemented will differentiate Meridian in the region, State and NW United States as an innovative community that truly integrates community development, economic development and land planning in a manner that is fiscally sustainable and respectful of the community Meridian once was and the mature city it is becoming.

Several of the major initiatives will require regional and state support and participation, as well as support from many education, workforce and business leaders. Communication and public relations for these special projects will take a targeted approach with sufficient resources.

The Next Steps the City of Meridian needs to take to implement the Economic Development Strategy are: —

- City Council adopt the Fields District Strategy.
- City Council adopt a Resolution which will put in place the Economic Development Strategy as a policy document for the city to incorporate into its business strategy.

- Seek assistance with aligning Meridian's economic development organizations with this Economic Development Strategy. Given the additional scope of economic development with this Strategy, ALL economic development organizations will need to align their staffing and resources to this plan.
- The Meridian Development Corporation should embrace their role as an economic development entity. The MDC Board should give serious consideration to expanding by creating new urban renewal districts similar to how Twin Falls has done for purposes of economic development.
- Communicate with partners and stakeholders involved in this project what steps Meridian will take to move these initiatives forward. This should entail a *sophisticated education and public relations campaign* on the Fields Strategy and Economic Development Strategy. Key to this campaign will be identification and buy-in of Meridian-based and regional private sector.
- Create *Organizational Structures* for catalyst projects and develop Business Plans for those initiatives that require more detailed planning
- Utilize BUSINESS READY TEAM (the steering committee created for this ED Audit project to serve as a Steering Committee for implementation of this plan and "Greeting Committee" for new business prospects.
- Lead and participate in a more detailed occupational and industry analysis
- City Council adoption of a Resolution which designates the Economic Development Strategy as a policy document for incorporation within the City's business strategy
- Aggressively implement this Strategy, by following the Implementation Matrix on the following pages.
- Implement the following organizational and marketing strategies:
  - **Marketing**- this is an area that needs a separate strategy, but that is very important to undertake. The Meridian Development

Corporation is beginning a branding strategy for Downtown, yet an overall City wide Marketing Strategy and brand should be created that encompasses downtown, business recruitment/attraction and tourism.

- **City Staff** - Additional resources will need to be immediately added to implement all the strategies and catalyst projects described herein. Business expansion, Downtown, Small Business and Entrepreneurship are the top priorities among businesses surveyed as part of this project. The Chamber will take a larger role in small business training, and a new lead entity will be the head entrepreneurship development with their new presence downtown. The City is not only the lead implementer on all of the Catalyst projects, but also facilitating this entire strategy. All of this will take significant resources, beyond the current resource allocation for economic development in Meridian.

Given all of this, the following City Economic Development Team is recommended to be formed. (Note, that this new formation will require one additional full-time employee who can assist economic development efforts but also on special projects (e.g., catalyst projects). The City's economic development team should consist of:

- o Mayor of Meridian –the Mayor should play a support role to the Economic Development team; represent the City at major events; participate in business prospect visits to Meridian; and advocate for Meridian's catalyst projects
- o Economic Development Manager – the ED Manager will manage all Economic Development efforts and staff; represents the City at business retention visits, trade shows; leads all business prospect visits; serves as primary implementer and convener for the Meridian Business Ready Team and participates in developer meetings
- o Economic Development Assistant – full-time staff person devoted solely to ED; manages and executes on business retention sur-

tracks progress of catalyst projects and economic development strategy implementation; and coordinates the Business Ready Team

- o Analyst/Assistant –shared staff in Community Development (1/4 to 1/2 time to ED); assists with preparation of analysis for economic development efforts, catalyst projects and marketing efforts

The implementation table in the following pages further iterates the necessary phasing as well as partnerships necessary for implementation. It is important to remember that the City will lead as a **convener** of stakeholders and **champion** of these initiatives, though not always the lead implementer.



## Implementation Matrix - Catalyst Projects

Strategy	Action Steps	Year				
		1	2	3	4	5
<b>Catalyst 1: Ag-Innovation Campus</b>  <b>Recommendation #1: Integrate the establishment of the Innovation Campus with the efforts of the Fields District Report, Recommendation 1</b>	1A. Engage Industry with Educational Institutions to Define Concrete Talent Development Goals, Tactics, Outcomes and Metrics.					
	1B. Establish an "Agricultural Talent Development, Commercialization & Research Campus" at a strategic location within Meridian.					
	1C. Create a Business Plan for the Ag-focused Talent Development Initiative + Ag Innovation Campus.					
	1D. Create a structure for the Ag-focused Talent Development Initiative					
<b>Catalyst 2: Agritourism Development</b>  <b>Recommendation #2: Create a comprehensive Ag-Tourism strategy centered on Meridian as the "Ag-Destination Hub of the Treasure Valley"</b>	2A. Convene local stakeholders as a Meridian Agritourism Steering Committee to carry out strategic planning and guide implementation efforts					
	2B. Convene regional Agritourism stakeholders to form a Treasure Valley Regional Agritourism entity					
	2C. Create a high profile, Ag-focused "destination attraction" in Meridian that provides a unique and complementary amenity for the Boise and Treasure Valley region.					
<b>Catalyst 3: Ag-based Land Development</b>  <b>Recommendation #3: Grow Meridian Sustainably</b>	3A. Use Fiscal Impact Modeling to improve fiscal sustainability of development.					
	3B: Convene a stakeholders working group comprised of developers, landowners, planners, bankers brokers and builders.					
	3C. Create a Land Use mechanism to foster Ag-based Real estate development(s)					
	2D: Work with a developer to create a Model Ag-based real estate development in Meridian					
<b>Catalyst 4: Downtown Conference Center</b>  <b>Recommendation #4: Create a Downtown Conference Center to provide space for meetings, trainings, and performing arts</b>	4A. Coordinate conference center/performance space development with local public and private stakeholders.					
	4B. Conduct a feasibility study for conference center/performance space; identify appropriate sources of funds for center development; and build a conference center.					



## Implementation Matrix - Catalyst Projects

Strategy	Action Steps	Year				
		1	2	3	4	5
<b>Catalyst 5: Venture Meridian Campus</b>  <b>Recommendation #5: Develop a Venture Meridian Campus to promote and anchor local entrepreneurship.</b>	5A. Have the City's recently hired Small Business Coordinator, Meridian Development Corporation and Chamber of Commerce assist in the relocation of businesses in the Vila Consultants Building at 33 E Idaho Ave into new office spaces throughout the Downtown.					
	5B. Lease the space to a leading entity, such as Boise State University or The Water Cooler, for the creation of a new Venture and Start-up campus for local residents of all ages.					
	5C. Partner with the lead entity to find new local Angel investors to have local representation on the Angel Investment Advisory team					
	5D. Lead efforts to provide an abundance of opportunities for start-ups, the existing business community, and consumers to interact, collaborate and innovate.					
	5E. Assist in connecting the Venture campus and entrepreneurs to funding sources at the Department of Labor, Idaho Tech Council, and the Idaho Small Business Development Council.					



## Implementation Matrix - Strategies

Strategy	Action Steps	Year				
		1	2	3	4	5
<b>Strategy 1: Talent and Innovation Ecosystem Cultivation</b>  <b>Key Catalyst Projects:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Ag Innovation Campus</li> <li>o Venture Meridian</li> </ul> <b>Strategic Recommendation #1: Establish a Talent Development-Industry Partnership initiative</b>	1A. Implement Catalyst Initiatives to provide infrastructure for talent and entrepreneurs. Promote these institutions as beacons of Meridian's entrepreneurial spirit.					
	1B. Provide targeted assistance to specialized firms in target industries who might be interested in cultivating entrepreneurs or "intra-preneurs" to service their ancillary or supply-chain needs.					
	1C. Feature local start-ups in marketing pieces for the City.					
	1D. Provide opportunities for entrepreneurs and start-ups to pitch concepts in public, interactive settings such as "5 minute pitch" showcases, or "Meet the Start-up" events for youth groups. Invite similar entrepreneurs from around the area to present opportunities for interaction and continued innovation.					
	1E. Track talent development-industry partnerships with strong data sharing to establish alumni networks to track talent for retention and attraction.					
	1F. Maintain close connections with all sides of the partnership to plan for necessary expansion or additional infrastructure and funding needs.					
	1G. Track state and national spending for workforce and entrepreneurship programs and provide evidence of City support in grant applications.					
	1H. Encourage at-risk youth to join vocational training programs or internships at an early age. Some schools speak to students of these opportunities as early as the 5th grade.					
<b>Strategy #2: Business Expansion</b>  <b>Key Catalyst Projects:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Ag-Focused Talent and Innovation Center</li> <li>o Downtown Conference Center</li> <li>o Venture Meridian Complex</li> </ul> <b>Strategic Recommendation #2: Expand and enhance a range of business development strategies based on Peer-based Retention, Attraction and Mentoring programs, and proactive small business support and import replacement tied to strong local industry targets.</b>	2A. The City of Meridian Economic Development staff should lead the development of a Business Retention and Expansion team, with support from the Chamber of Commerce.					
	2B. The City should add one additional full-time staff person assigned for administrating special projects laid out in this report and to assist in coordination of business expansion efforts.					
	2C. Some of the largest employers in Meridian are homegrown, with strong commitments to the City. The City should continue to work with them to insure basic infrastructural and workforce needs are met.					
	2D. Meridian should continue to cultivate, define, and empower its "Business Ready-Team" with a coherent message for companies considering locating to Meridian.					

## Implementation Matrix - Strategies

Strategy	Action Steps	Year				
		1	2	3	4	5
<b>Strategy 3: Tourism</b>  <b>Key Catalyst Projects:</b> o Downtown Conference Center o AgTourism Initiative  <b>Strategic Recommendation #3: Adopt Tourism as an industry segment to grow in Meridian</b>	2E. The Chamber of Commerce should support small business development through peer-to-peer trainings, mentoring, information exchange, and networking events.					
	2F: The Chamber of Commerce should offer member-exclusive advertising services on its website and through other media.					
	2G: The City should encourage the Chamber to lead small business support services, while supporting the business community through developing a "one-stop shop" to assist firms in navigating regulations and codes and identifying potential sources of public funding or procurement opportunities. It should also support infrastructure projects that support entrepreneurship and the small business community, such as the catalyst projects identified in this report.					
	2H. Implement the Catalyst projects					
	2I. Initiate a "Made in Meridian" campaign					
	3A. Convene a meeting with the Chamber of Commerce leadership and Meridian to discuss a Tourism Strategy.					
	3B. Develop a Tourism Strategy					
	3C. Convene a meeting with State and Local tourism experts to discuss Meridian's tourism goals					
	3D. Implement the Catalyst Projects.					
	3E. Determine if a special assessment district or tax is appropriate for Meridian to create and use for tourism efforts.					
	3F. Develop marketing collateral that is focused on specific target markets for tourism.					
	3G. Convene a Scenic Byways meeting with all those involved (state, regional, public, private) to determine how to better coordinate and market the Scenic Byways, and if there is a role for Meridian.					
	3H. Advocate for Highway 16 to be the Scenic Byways connector.					



## Implementation Matrix - Strategies

Strategy	Action Steps	Year				
		1	2	3	4	5
<b>Strategy 4: Land Use, Transportation and Infrastructure</b>  <b>Key Catalyst Projects:</b> o Ag Heritage Center o Ag-focused Real Estate Development o Coordinated Land Use, Transportation and Infrastructure Policies  <b>Strategic Recommendation 4: Integrate Sustainable Land Use practices with Transportation Improvements and Infrastructure Investments.</b>	4a. City staff should convene an internal discussion about this Strategy. The goal of the discussion should be to develop specific internal processes that will need to be further developed and approved before implementing.					
	4B. Implement the Ag-Heritage and Ag-Focused Real Estate Catalyst projects					
	4C. The City should perform a Citywide Fiscal Impact Analysis to analyze and determine if the current development pattern is the best policy for the city moving forward.					
	4D. The Capital Improvements Plan should be modified based on the citywide fiscal analysis. A serious consideration should be given to whether or not the City should extend infrastructure to the South of let the southern region of the City continue to maintain its rural character with larger lot subdivisions.					
	4E. The City Council should maintain to the City's 10-year and then Annual CIP. This will allow the City and Staff to be proactive with its investment, which will save the City and its taxpayers millions over a 10-year period.					
	4F. City should establish and maintain an approval, permit and utility outlay system that maintains to the City's Comprehensive Plan and Capital Improvements Plan					
	4G. The City should actively market its green and sustainable initiatives including this Fields Initiative, and also the Water Reclamation project with the city's wastewater treatment facility.					
	4H. Aggressively implement the bicycle program, in collaboration with Meridian's transportation partners.					
	4I. Engage, or re-energize the discussion in the region for Regional Commuter Rail.					
	4J. Implement the Regional Commuter Rail.					
	4K. Continue to utilize the City's wastewater by-products as economic development tools.					
	4L. Develop an incentive policy utilizing the wastewater by-products as economic development incentives.					
	4M. Complete the Chinden improvements by widening Highways 20 and Highways 26.					
	4N. Complete Highway 16.					

## Implementation Matrix - Strategies

Strategy	Action Steps	Year				
		1	2	3	4	5
<b>Strategy 5: Strengthen Downtown</b>  <b>Key Catalyst Projects</b> o Downtown Conference Center o Venture Meridian	5A. Work with the Meridian Development Corporation (MDC) to clarify their role in Economic Development					
	5B. Make Quality of Place a guiding light for all aesthetic and structural improvements to the downtown					
	5C. Increase Employment in the Downtown by leveraging City-owned properties					
	5D. Increase recreation, entertainment, and dining options in the Downtown.					
	5E. Increase livability of the Downtown					
	5F. Improve Downtown transportation & connectivity					
<b>Strategy #6: Strengthen Quality of Place</b>  <b>Key Catalyst Projects</b> o Ag-based Land Development o Agritourism Development  <b>Strategic Recommendation 6: Promote Quality of Place through arts and entertainment programs, wayfinding and signage, and streetscape improvements that draw upon Meridian's agricultural heritage.</b>	6A. Provide a greater variety of entertainment venues and events in walkable areas.					
	6B. Host City-wide events (street fairs, music festivals, local vendor exhibitions) at a variety of times and with vendors, live music, and amenities that cater to a diversity of residents and visitors.					
	6C. Launch an Art in Public Places program.					
	6D. Ensure authentic, place-based design of City Wayfinding and signage					
	6E. Improve the City's Walkability: the most walkable areas are the downtown and the Village, however these are walkable islands in an overall car-dependent city.					
	6F. Integrate the community's ag heritage into the public realm in creative, interactive ways. This will integrate well into agritourism development.					

