

**Downtown Meridian Urban Renewal Area
URBAN RENEWAL ELIGIBILITY REPORT**

Prepared for
The City of Meridian
and
The Meridian Development Corporation

by
McKibben + Cooper Architects
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Authorization of the Report

An agreement of May 2002, with the City of Meridian, Idaho, authorized preparation of the subject report. The Report provides visual observations of some of the conditions for eligibility of the Downtown Meridian Urban Renewal Area as an urban renewal area as per Idaho Code. The ability to plan and initiate urban renewal projects in the Area is contingent on the eligibility of the Area. Determination of eligibility is the first step of four in the planning process of an urban renewal area. An outline of the planning process is described below.

Urban Renewal Planning Process

(1) Meridian City Council must make a resolution with findings as per Idaho Code for a defined geographic area within the city to be designated as the urban renewal area.

Idaho Code Section 50-2008(a) states:

An urban renewal project for an urban renewal area shall not be planned or initiated unless the local governing body has, by resolution, determined such area to be a deteriorated area or a deteriorating area or a combination thereof and designated such area as appropriate for an urban renewal project.

DEFINITION OF DETERIORATING AREA, I.C.

§ 50-2018(i) AND DETERIORATED AREA, I.C.

§ 50-2903(7)(b) and (c):

50-2018(i) and 50-2903(7)(b) are substantially the same:

A “Deteriorating area” shall mean an area which by reason of the presence of (1) a substantial number of deteriorated or deteriorating structures; (2) predominance of defective or inadequate street layout; (3) faulty lot layout in relation to size, adequacy, accessibility or usefulness; (4) insanitary or unsafe conditions; (5) deterioration of site or other improvements; (6) diversity of ownership; (7) tax or special assessment delinquency exceeding the fair value of the land; (8) defective or unusual conditions of title; (9) or the existence of conditions which endanger life or property by fire and other causes; (10) or any

combination of such factors], (a) (results in economic underdevelopment of the area)*; (b) substantially impairs or arrests the sound growth of a municipality; (c) retards the provision of housing accommodations; or (d) constitutes an economic or social liability; and (e) is a menace to the public health, safety, morals or welfare in its present condition or use: Provided, that if such deteriorating area consists of open land the conditions contained in the proviso in section 50-2008(d), Idaho Code, shall apply.

50-2903(7)(c) Any area which is predominately open and which because of obsolete platting, diversity of ownership, deterioration of structures or improvements, or otherwise, results in economic underdevelopment of the area or substantially impairs or arrests the sound growth of a municipality. The provisions of section 50-2008(d), Idaho Code, shall apply to open areas.

*Appears only in the revenue allocation statute.

- (2) The Urban Renewal Agency (Meridian Development Corporation) must prepare an urban renewal plan and recommend its approval to the Meridian City Council.
- (3) The Meridian City Council must refer the urban renewal plan to the Meridian Planning and Zoning Commission and set a public hearing on the Plan. The Meridian Planning and Zoning Commission must complete findings that the urban renewal plan conforms to the City's Comprehensive Plan.
- (4) Meridian City Council must hold a public hearing and adopt an ordinance approving the Plan.

Observed Conditions of Deterioration in Designated Area

The definition of a deteriorating and deteriorated area, noted above [Idaho Code §§ 50-2018(i) and 50-2903(7)(b)], lists ten different conditions that may be present in such an area, with the tenth being “any combination of such factors.” The presence of some of the conditions was observed during field visits during May and June 2002 and was documented in photographs. Listed below is each condition, a description of how it was interpreted, and a response as to whether the condition was found in the Area.” Because a portion of the Area, the southwest corner of Meridian Road and Waltman Lane, is predominately open land, this area must qualify under Idaho Code Section 50-2008(d), a copy of which is included in Attachment A. Attachment B is a map with the Downtown Meridian Urban Renewal Area outlined for reference. Photographs appear in Attachment C.

(1) Substantial number of deteriorated or deteriorating structures.

- “Deteriorated” structures are interpreted as those in such condition that they present a safety hazard and should be demolished. This Report does not include the in-depth investigation necessary to determine whether a structure has deteriorated to the point that demolition is required, so potentially “deteriorated” structures are identified as “deteriorating.” “Deteriorating” structures are interpreted as those that are in a state of disrepair, may be empty, and are deemed detrimental to adjacent development or property improvement. For this report, exterior existing conditions were identified by visual observations from the street only. No in-depth analysis or interior observations were made.

Deteriorating structures were found in the area bounded by the Union Pacific Railroad Corridor, Main Street, Broadway Avenue, and W. 4th Street with the partially abandoned Old Creamery at Meridian Road and Broadway as the best example. The area along East Broadway Street east of Main Street has several old storefront commercial buildings that appear to have been empty and deteriorating for some time. The area bounded by the Rail Corridor, Main Street, Franklin Road, and E. 4th Street includes some deteriorating houses as well as an old blacksmith shop with a fallen roof. Other areas with deteriorating structures include: the area bounded by Pine Street, Meridian Road, the Rail Corridor, and W. 4th Street and certain parcels along Meridian Road from Franklin Road to Cherry Lane.

(2) Predominance of defective or inadequate street layout.

- Defective or inadequate street layouts are those that include streets that are discontinuous, dead-end, do not serve the current intensity of use, or do not allow safe access for emergency vehicles.

While there are portions of a connected grid system within the Area, there are areas with discontinuous streets due to streets dead-ending at the railroad tracks and canals. This pattern reduces possibility of access, puts additional pressure on the connected streets for vehicular and pedestrian circulation, and creates a convoluted, unsafe condition for fire, police, and emergency medical service protection. This pattern was found in the following areas: the area bounded by Fairview Avenue, Carlton Street, 2 1/2 Street, and the Five Mile Canal; the areas near the Railroad Corridor west of Meridian Road and east of E. 3rd Street; and the area between Franklin Road and I-84 west of Meridian Road.

In addition, large parcels west of Meridian Road near the I-84 Interchange have difficult access to Main Street.

(3) Faulty lot layout in relation to size, adequacy, accessibility or usefulness.

- Faulty lot layouts are those that are too small for reasonable development, have identifiable obstacles to development, have accessibility and safety problems, or are not useful for other reasons.

Small parcels inadequate for current typical commercial development exist throughout the Area.

Deep, narrow lots and flag lots, in the area west of Meridian Road between Franklin Road and the I-84 Interchange and in the area south of the Railroad Corridor between 3rd and 5th Streets, have rear portions that are underutilized and have safety access problems. Construction of additional streets and re-parcelization into smaller lots could provide additional building lots and an opportunity for existing owners to sell some of their underutilized land. Deep, narrow lots and flag lots west of Meridian Road north of Waltman Lane also have access and safety problems. Larger lots west of Meridian Road near the I-84 Interchange have inadequate access to Meridian Road and are not reasonably and safely connected to Waltman Lane. There are also parcels east of 2 1/2 Street that have difficult access.

(4) Insanitary or unsafe conditions.

- “Insanitary” conditions may include excessive amounts of junk, visible disabled vehicles, trash, and weeds in violation of City sanitation codes. “Unsafe” conditions may include empty, abandoned and deteriorating structures; lack of, discontinuous, or broken sidewalks; lack of, or broken curbs; lack of or discontinuous handicap accessibility; and lack of emergency vehicle access.

“Insanitary” conditions were identified in the area bounded by the Railroad Corridor, E. 4th Street, Franklin Road, and Main Street in the form of junk, disabled vehicles, trash and weeds.

“Unsafe” conditions were identified in the area bounded by the Rail Corridor, E.4th Street, Franklin Road, and Main Street, where there are abandoned buildings, and few or no curbs and sidewalks. The primarily residential area bounded by the Railroad Corridor, Meridian Road, W. 4th Street, and Pine Street also has few curbs and non-existing, broken, or discontinuous sidewalks. The area west of Meridian Road between Washington Street and Fairview Avenue also has sidewalk problems and some deteriorating homes. The area bounded by Fairview Avenue, E. 3rd Street, Broadway Avenue, and Main Street also has sidewalk problems, disabled vehicles, junk, and weeds. Handicap accessible sidewalks are not available in most of the area except for Main Street and a few other commercial streets.

The following large lots have difficult access for emergency vehicles making these areas unsafe: the lots in the area west of Meridian Road between I-84 Interchange and Franklin Road; the lots in the area near Hope Arms west of Meridian Road; the lots in the area east of 2 1/2 Street; the lots on the Rail Corridor; the lots in the area bounded by Fairview Avenue, Washington Street, Meridian Road, and 2 1/2 Street.

Empty buildings exist on East and West Broadway, including the Old Creamery (which is empty except for one portion). Empty buildings also exist in the area bounded by the Railroad Corridor, E. 4th Street, Franklin Road, and Main Street and the area bounded by Cherry Lane, Meridian Road, the Rail Corridor, and W. 4th Street.

(5) Deterioration of site and other improvements.

- Deteriorating site improvements include deteriorating elements other than buildings, such as parking lots, fences, landscaping, and auxiliary structures that make up a developed

property. Deteriorating “other improvements” include deteriorating off-site and public elements such as streets, sidewalks, curbs, gutters, bridges, storm drains, parks, water mains, sanitary sewers, and public facilities. This Report includes only a survey of visible, exterior, above-ground features. An analysis of below-ground infrastructure is not included in this Report, however the Meridian Public Works Department has acknowledged the presence of old clay sewers in the area that will require replacement as development occurs. The scope of this report does not include sites or analysis of such sewers.

“Unsafe” conditions, noted above in Item 4, include lack of and deteriorating sidewalks, curbs, gutters, and handicap accessibility. Additionally, driveways are deteriorating in these areas also.

Parking lot deterioration includes lots located in the following areas: near the Meridian Speedway, Storey Park, and the Old Creamery; in areas of industrial and commercial use near the Rail Corridor; in areas bounded by the Rail Corridor, E. 4th Street, Franklin Road, and Meridian Road; and in areas east of Main Street at Fairview Avenue.

Deteriorating fencing, landscaping, driveway, shed and garages exist sprinkled throughout the area, with some severe cases on Meridian Road.

(6) Diversity of ownership.

- Diversity of ownership is a characteristic applied to commercial areas where larger development parcels are necessary for viable commercial projects. When commercial areas are characterized by a proliferation of small parcels under different ownership, new development is often severely limited because of the difficulty in assembling large enough parcels at a reasonable cost.

Diversity of ownership in the form of small parcels exists primarily in the area roughly bounded by Fairview Avenue, E. 4th Street, Franklin Road, and Meridian Road. Pressure to re-develop small residential properties into commercial properties is potentially high in this area where high visibility from well-traveled roads exists (such as Main Street and Meridian Road).

(7) Tax of special assessment delinquency exceeding the fair value of the land.

This condition was not evaluated in this report.

(8) Defective or unusual conditions of title.

This condition was not evaluated in this report.

(9) The existence of conditions which endanger life or property by fire and other causes.

- “Conditions which endanger life or property by fire and other causes” may include visible conditions presenting potential fire hazards such as abandoned buildings and vehicles, trash and weeds. The presence of deteriorating structures or site elements and the inadequacy of fire protection facilities for existing and projected new development may endanger lives.

Visible conditions of deterioration have been noted above in items 1, 4, and 5. The determination of the adequacy of fire protection facilities is not addressed in this Report, however the Meridian Fire Department has indicated that there may be some areas not adequately served by fire hydrants. The scope of this Report does not include sites or analysis.

(10) Any combination of such factors.

Combinations of conditions of deterioration primarily exist in the following areas: the area of Old Creamery located on Broadway Avenue west of Meridian Road; the areas along the Rail Corridor; the areas east and west of Main Street at south of the Rail Corridor to Franklin Road; the area east of E. 3rd Street north of the Rail Corridor.

Effect of Present Conditions

(a) Results in economic underdevelopment of the area.

Field observations found under-developed property in the area of Meridian Road and I-84 Corridor, as well as areas on Meridian Road at Gem Avenue. Other under-developed parcels exist near the Rail Corridor and near 2 1/2 Street.

(b) Substantially impairs or arrests the sound growth of a municipality.

Ownership diversity, deteriorating structures, lack of appropriate lot size for commercial use, lack of adequate parking facilities, as well as lack of sidewalks, curbs and gutters have

substantially inhibited the sound growth of the downtown area. Because of these conditions, existing owners are often discouraged from upgrading and expanding. New development has been slowed or thwarted because of this lack of necessary infrastructure and proper configuration. Under-development, empty commercial structures and aging industrial properties have contributed to stagnation in the Downtown even while suburban strip areas have grown. Such uneven growth adversely affects the sound growth of the City because it distorts the City's capital improvement programming with attempts to catch up with the unmet infrastructure needs.

(c) Retards the provision of housing accommodations or (d) constitutes an economic or social liability.

Older residential and industrial areas suffering from inadequate public infrastructure, as noted above, tend to increase public service costs without much increased generation of property and other taxes and thus tend to become an economic liability for the City.

(d) And is a menace to the public health, safety, morals, or welfare in its present condition or welfare in its present condition or use.

The findings above conclude that the Area has become a modest health, safety, and economic liability because of deteriorating and empty properties, and lack of connected streets, sidewalks, emergency vehicle access. These conditions represent a threat to the public welfare, prosperity and safety of the community.

Open Land Area

The characteristics listed in the definition of an open land area, Section 50-2903(7)(c) (above on page 2), are similar to those of deteriorated and deteriorating areas, Sections 50-2018(i) and 50-2903(7)(b), under the same or similar descriptions. The final term, "or otherwise," at least implies that a predominately open area shares some of the same characteristics as the previous definition of deteriorated area, Idaho Code Section 50-2903(7)(b). There is also an additional qualification that, "The provisions of Section 50-2008(d), Idaho Code, shall apply to open areas."

Section 50-2008(d), in Attachment A, lists the findings that the City Council must make in the ordinance approving an urban renewal plan. In addition, this section lists the special findings that the City Council must make "if the urban renewal area consists of an area of

open land to be acquired by the urban renewal agency.” There are separate findings if the area of open land is to be developed for residential uses or for non-residential uses.

Open land areas may be acquired by the Agency and developed for nonresidential uses if such acquisition is needed to solve various problems associated with the land or the public infrastructure that have hindered its development. Problems included are defective or usual conditions of title, diversity of ownership, tax delinquency, improper subdivisions, outmoded street patterns, deterioration of site, and faulty lot layout. All of these problems are included in one form or another in the definition of deteriorated area in Section 50-2903(7)(b). The problems that are listed solely in Section 50-2008(d)(4)(2) (the Open Land section) include “economic disuse, unsuitable topography,” and “the need for the correlation of the area with other areas of a municipality by streets and modern traffic requirements, or any combination of such factors or other conditions which retard development of the area.” Hence, open land areas qualify to be included in an urban renewal plan if any of the standard 50-2018(i) and 50-2903(7)(b) characteristics apply. Such areas also qualify if any of the problems listed only in 50-2008(d)(4)(2) apply. The large area of undeveloped land in the area north of I-84 and west of Meridian Road may qualify as “open land”, as it has no sewer, water, or coordination with “modern traffic requirements.”

Determination of Appropriateness of the Area for an Urban Renewal Project

The Meridian City Council must make a policy decision determining whether or not the area constitutes a “deteriorating” area appropriate for urban renewal projects (Attachment D contains the definition of Urban Renewal Project as per Idaho Code). This report has provided evidence that the designated Downtown Meridian Urban Renewal Area constitutes a deteriorating area because of the presence of deteriorating, insanitary, unsafe, and faulty conditions.

The preparation and approval of an urban renewal plan, including a revenue allocation financing provision, will give the City and the Meridian Development Corporation additional resources to help solve the public infrastructure, land parcelization, and safety access problems in this area with urban renewal projects. Revenues generated from new development will help support improvement projects within the Area and stimulate new development.

ATTACHMENT A
PREPARATION AND APPROVAL OF PLAN FOR URBAN RENEWAL PROJECT
I. C. § 50-2008(d)

(d) Following [such] hearing, the local governing body may approve an urban renewal project and the plan therefore if it finds that (1) a feasible method exists for the location of families who will be displaced from the urban renewal area in decent, safe and sanitary dwelling accommodations within their means and without undue hardship to such families; (2) the urban renewal plan conforms to the general plan of the municipality as a whole; (3) the urban renewal plan gives due consideration to the provision of adequate park and recreational areas and facilities that may be desirable for neighborhood improvement, with special consideration for the health, safety and welfare of children residing in the general vicinity of the site covered by the plan; and (4) the urban renewal plan will afford maximum opportunity, consistent with the sound needs of the municipality as a whole, for the rehabilitation or redevelopment of the urban renewal area by private enterprise: Provided, that if the urban renewal area consists of an area of open land to be acquired by the urban renewal agency, such area shall not be so acquired unless (1) it is to be developed for residential uses, the local governing body shall determine that a shortage of housing of sound standards and design which is decent, safe and sanitary exists in the municipality; that the need for housing accommodations has been or will be increased as a result of the clearance of slums in other areas; that the conditions of blight in the area and the shortage of decent, safe and sanitary housing cause or contribute to an increase in and spread of disease and crime and constitute a menace to the public health, safety, morals, or welfare; and that the acquisition of the area for residential uses is an integral part of and essential to the program of the municipality, or (2) if it is to be developed for nonresidential uses, the local governing body shall determine that such nonresidential uses are necessary and appropriate to facilitate the proper growth and development of the community in accordance with sound planning standards and local community objectives, which acquisition may require the exercise of governmental action, as provided in this act, because of defective or unusual conditions of title, diversity of ownership, tax delinquency, improper subdivisions, outmoded street patterns, deterioration of site, economic disuse, unsuitable topography or faulty lot layouts, the need for the correlation of the area with other areas of a municipality by streets and modern traffic requirements, or any combination of such factors or other conditions which retard development of the area.

ATTACHMENT B
MAP OF DOWNTOWN MERIDIAN URBAN RENEWAL AREA

ATTACHMENT C
PHOTOGRAPHS

These photographs were taken by McKibben + Cooper Architects in Late May and early June, 2002 of portions of the Downtown Meridian Urban Renewal Area. This is not a complete record of every site, but is intended to serve as support for the Report.

ATTACHMENT D
DEFINITION OF URBAN RENEWAL PROJECT,
I.C. § 50-2018(j)

“Urban renewal project” may include undertakings and activities of a municipality in an urban renewal area for the elimination of deteriorated or deteriorating areas and for the prevention of the development or spread of slums and blight, and may involve slum clearance and redevelopment in an urban renewal area, or rehabilitation or conservation in an urban renewal area, or any combination or part thereof in accordance with an urban renewal plan. Such undertakings and activities may include:

- (1) acquisition of a deteriorated area or a deteriorating area or portion thereof;
- (2) demolition and removal of buildings and improvements;
- (3) installation, construction, or reconstruction of streets, utilities, parks, playgrounds, off-street parking facilities, public facilities or buildings and other improvements necessary for carrying out in the urban renewal area the urban renewal objectives of this act in accordance with the urban renewal plan;
- (4) disposition of any property acquired in the urban renewal area (including sale, initial leasing or retention by the agency itself) at its fair value for uses in accordance with the urban renewal plan except for disposition of property to another public body;
- (5) carrying out plans for a program of voluntary or compulsory repair and rehabilitation of building or other improvements in accordance with the urban renewal plan;
- (6) acquisition of real property in the urban renewal area which, under the urban renewal plan, is to be repaired or rehabilitated for dwelling use or related facilities, repair or rehabilitation of the structures for guidance purposes, and resale of the property;
- (7) acquisition of any other real property in the urban renewal area where necessary to eliminate unhealthful, insanitary or unsafe conditions, lessen density, eliminate obsolete or other uses detrimental to the public welfare, or otherwise to remove or to prevent the spread of blight or deterioration, or to provide land for needed public facilities;
- (8) lending or investing federal funds; and
- (9) construction of foundations, platforms and other like structural forms.