

# State of the City 2017

Mayor Tammy de Weerd, Meridian, Idaho

**INTRO VIDEO:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zXUSgmZSF8w>

Whew! I made it, just in time! And boy do I have a lot to share with you today! Thank you so much for joining us.

As I wrote this year's State of the City, we were in the middle of a historic weather event. While it has been quite the experience, it also highlighted what I love so much about this community and our City employees. I issued my first ever *Declaration of Emergency* and the City Council authorized spending authority to assist Ada County Highway District, the West Ada School District and our residents. Our Parks department employees cleared 71 miles of priority pathways and sidewalks; Public Works helped with storm drains; our police carried shovels in their cars and helped drivers out of snow banks; and our firefighters cleared snow for the sick and elderly. The City created an incident command team and our Meridian Storm Hotline to make sure your needs were heard. It was all hands on deck. Across the community, I saw and heard about so many neighbors stepping up to help one another. Definitely, 'MyMeridian'.

This doesn't come as any surprise, but in last years' address I noted during my door knocking, that the sense of pride was palatable from what residents shared with me. This pride was also reflected in Boise State University's School of Public Service survey. The results were impressive for the Treasure Valley; 82% said the valley was a good place to work and build a career and 96% said it was a great place to raise a family. In Meridian 98% of people rated their quality of life in their neighborhood as good or excellent

People are proud of their Meridian, our Meridian, MyMeridian.

This past year we have seen national recognition for our community. Businesses are expanding and locating to Meridian. People are choosing one of our many great subdivisions to call home. I am pleased to say that the State of our City is Thriving.

Each year, it is an honor to bring examples of what we are doing as a city, working alongside our community. A growing and thriving city does have its challenges, which stresses the importance of working with our partners and Legislators on issues outside of our jurisdiction such as roads, schools, and libraries. Our team is focused on delivering progress in our five strategic focus areas: Strategic Growth; Economic Vibrancy; Responsive Government; Safe, Healthy & Secure; and Arts, Culture & Recreation.

Our departments have organized key objectives around these priority areas and I'm here today to give you a glimpse into their efforts and accomplishments this last year and the work before them in 2017.

The first area of focus is *Strategic Growth*.

'Water is the new gold' and water quality is the life line of any prosperous community. Our Public Works team has spent the last several years in discussions with the State of Idaho, our neighboring cities and water agencies, about a serious issue regarding the protection of our ground water sources.

We petitioned the Department of Water Resources for an area of drilling concern. This was to protect our ground water related to contamination from private wells located near our municipal wells. While we didn't get the designation we sought, we received the administrative rules and enforcement we were looking for on abandoning wells and constructing new ones. This process raised the importance of protecting our ground water for the long term. So much so, our Legislators will be seeking specific funding for a study of our ground water quality in the Treasure Valley.

At our Wastewater Treatment plant off Ten Mile, we are committed to meeting the increasing service demands as well as the ever-growing and ever-changing regulatory requirements. We are currently undergoing the most massive and costly expansion project in Meridian's history. Phase one is a \$45 million dollar renovation to our sewer treatment plant. Work on these upgrades will begin this year and is expected to take 30 months to complete.

Our Public Works Department has been busy and their numbers show it. Last year, we added 19 miles of water line, 12 miles of sewer line, 280 new fire hydrants and 400 new street lights, to name a few. With these additions, we have a total of 535 miles of water line, which is the distance from Meridian to Seattle; and 435 miles of sewer line, the distance from Meridian to Salt Lake.

Land use and economic development are critical in the Strategic Growth priority. Nampa and Meridian, our two counties, and others are focused on where our cities will meet and develop a complementary land use plan that focuses on 'jobs' in northwest Meridian and northeast Nampa. "Growing Together" is an effort to identify and define agriculture related economic development opportunities. We simply must bring family wage jobs closer to where the workforce lives. This is a regional issue.

And that leads us into our second strategic focus, Economic *Vibrancy*.

Meridian can't be a best place to live without creating a healthy environment to work and do business.

I'm thrilled to announce the job numbers from 2016. They are impressive! We saw a 10.1% increase in jobs in Meridian, many of which were family wage jobs.

Wage growth averaged over \$2,000, a 6.1% increase. And our unemployment continued to rate below that of the nations at 3.5%.

Our new construction values in 2016 continue to be among the highest in the state at \$430 million dollars, nearly a 10% increase over last year.

Our 'business friendly' efforts from Building Services and Planning, reduced application times for permits, in the area of *signs* and *fast-tracked occupancies*, from 1-3 working days to a same day turn around!

Meridian's small business community is a large focus of ours. We love to see our small businesses succeed. Here's one example.

*It's All About You Catering* was started by Beth Alpaugh in south Meridian as *MeTime Coffee* 15 years ago. She relocated to downtown as *The Grotto Coffeeshouse* but soon became consumed by her catering success. She expanded to her 'grab n go' wholesale by landing Meridian-based Jackson Food Stores. Beth opened her 7500 square foot commercial kitchen and corporate offices last year. She provides *Simple Bites* - these 'grab and go' foods are in convenience stores, coffeeshouses, and other retail outfits.

While we love seeing businesses like Beth's, grow, we also want to see business excel and stay in downtown. *SaaSFocus*, a global technology consulting firm, continues to grow overtaking the entire Heritage Building on the corner of Idaho and Main. Josh Evarts opened *The Vault*, a historic 1,000 square foot building on Second and Idaho, transforming it into a boutique event space.

Josh is pursuing his next project on Main and Broadway. This \$2 million dollar project will kick off this June and will set a standard in downtown for others to follow. It is the first loft-style, mixed use, residential living concept in downtown. Another exciting project, Paul & Krista McKenna, of *Meridian Cycles* will begin their renovation project of the *Frontier Club* on Broadway early this summer. This new space offers room to grow and their vision includes a 'Nano Brewery', naming Brian Renstrom as their brew master.

Our Downtown also saw the completion of the first phase of “placemaking” along one block of Idaho Avenue. Placemaking is a process for invigorating community spaces creating a destination. Idaho Avenue improvements included increasing public space by extending the sidewalks into the street. This attracted *Blue Sky Bagels* to downtown, a business that caught the vision. The next phase hopes to build on this success by creating an Arts & Culture ecosystem, another revitalization strategy that marries the arts with both economic & community development, bringing people to Downtown Meridian.

The Meridian Development Corporation brightened downtown with new banners on Main Street, and the Meridian Library’s ‘makers’ space’ location. *Unbound* is flourishing, with close to 8,900 visitors last year. This space is unbelievable, check it out!

Across town, the ‘energy’ and success at *The Village at Meridian* continues. They welcomed 11 retail businesses, and 4 office tenants. Combined, these new businesses brought 600 plus jobs to *The Village*! Sources tell me they are close to signing 5 new leases with key retailers. For now, it’s a secret!

The exciting work happening in the nearby Health Sciences and Technology Corridor, The Core; is attracting business visitors to this area. The reason: Idaho State University’s AP & BioSkills Lab. Businesses like it so much they have a great reason to stay! Take a look.

**A&P LAB VIDEO:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DdknRyx5v7I>

As you heard, this amenity along with the reputation and work of ISU’s Meridian campus, was a major reason the Idaho College of Osteopathic Medicine (ICOM) will turn dirt on the ISU campus later this spring. The applicant-status ICOM will be Idaho’s first medical college – answering a long desire to offer medical education in our state.

Economic vibrancy has discovered the Ten Mile interchange area. Meridian created its first economic development urban renewal district east of Ten Mile and north of -I84. This area

already has issued building permits for two headquartered businesses, *AmeriBen* and *Brighton Corporation*.

I had hoped to make a big announcement today, but we just couldn't make it official in time! Stay tuned.

Strategic focus area 3 is ***Responsive Government***.

We must to be responsive to our business community that creates our prosperity, and we need to work effectively together and be accountable to our citizens.

Our Finance team celebrated the completion of a two year process implementing our utility billing software program, *TrueBill*. This was a major undertaking involving multiple departments. *TrueBill*, is the software behind our utility billing statements and online services. It offers more information to our citizens; usage graphs, real-time payment options, and has system capacity to handle growth for years to come.

Our Clerk's Office took on the ambitious project this year of revamping and automating our dog licensing process. Forty-five percent of Meridian households own one or more dogs, estimated to be 17,000 dogs, all required to be licensed. We eliminated the need to provide information from veterinarians annually and licenses are now valid for one year from date of purchase. In addition, we enhanced our partnership with veterinary businesses to issue licenses on the City's behalf. We share the license fee and create a win-win for the businesses, dog owners and the city. This demonstrates responsive government through partnerships, resulting in a minimal cost.

Partnerships are key and we've seen that in other areas. The Mayor's Senior Advisory Board (MSAB), now in its second year, maximizes their impact through working with others. CPR courses were developed with our Fire Prevention Division; and our Drivers Safety program through our Police and Crime Prevention, has resulted in a reduction of insurance costs for many of our senior participants. Another highlight for seniors is the collaboration between *Harvest*

*Church and Go-Ride*, a public transportation choice! *Harvest Transit* is a free, accessible transport for seniors and persons with disabilities to reach services and activities.

MSAB is one example of the power of engaging our people. Much is accomplished through the work of our citizens, another reason why Meridian resonates as MyMeridian to many. Listen for yourself.

**COMMISSIONER VIDEO:** [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9rUnQ\\_ZqMhA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9rUnQ_ZqMhA)

I would ask all of our commissioners and volunteers who donate time to the city to please stand.

A key milestone in our ‘responsive government’ went live today. I am excited to announce the launch of our City’s transparency portal, *OpenGov*. Constituents can explore financial data to learn and understand how their tax dollars are spent. It will give departments and elected officials the financial and performance insights they need to operate more efficiently. Meridian is the second city in Idaho to offer this level of transparency, which is fundamental to a responsive government and being accountable to our citizens.

Talking about being accountable to our citizens, a brief update on the courtroom issue, related to a 1994 Court order requiring Meridian to provide a courtroom, an order we felt was addressed with the 1996 citizen’s initiative to consolidate the court system and the opening of the Ada County Courthouse in 2002.

The Court recently issued their opinion and ordered that Meridian’s compliance must increase from a single courtroom, to a full-scale facility with 25 holding cells. Need and cost were not factors as the court has ‘broad discretion’ pursuant to Idaho Code. The order is not final until after the 2017 Idaho Legislative session, as the Court has asked the Legislature to weigh in.

If this moves forward, Meridian citizens would be the only taxpayers in the State paying for a magistrate court facility in their city. And pay again, for this same service, through the court levy

Meridian citizens pay as Ada County taxpayers. This would also decentralize an entire statewide system.

Meridian has always had an attitude of being part of the solution. We join the District Court in asking our Legislature for a solution. This has a potential statewide impact, not just to one city. We look to propose a Legislative working group with the Courts, Counties, Cities, and the Senate and House represented. Please follow this closely as we may need you to weigh in with our elected officials.

Strategic focus area is *Safe, Healthy, & Secure*.

Meridian continues to be the safest city of our size in the State. Being a safe city is a huge reason we are listed among the best places to live in the country. This is our top priority.

Our Public Safety Department accomplishments are telling as to why.

The Meridian Police Department saw the benefit and value for body worn cameras three years ago, before they were cool. Since implementation there has been a 69% drop in officer complaints!

Our Police received their reaccreditation, 1 of 18 among Idaho's 200 plus cities to hold this. The School Resource Officer Program received the Community Service Award from the Idaho US Attorney and Department of Justice for their impact in our schools, in the community, and with our youth.

Here is one example of why. I received a letter from Heritage Middle School. They wanted us to know the positive impact Officer Ray Ellis has in their school, helping their school feel safe and welcome to students. But it's also his involvement with the kids. As a published author himself, he shares his personal time to coach and mentor students, even helping them publish! True servant leadership! Thank you Officer Ray and all our SRO's for the work you do.



In Fire, our City Council adopted response standards following the Meridian Fire Department's master plan and recent changes to our data collection. This focus and information allows for relevant benchmarking that better defines goals and future planning.

Our *Heart Safe Initiative* continued efforts in partnership with our Parks Department adding additional AED units in parks. This coming year, is something equally exciting, YOU can help save a life. The EMS Partnership will launch a Pulse Point phone app later this spring, increasing the response to sudden cardiac arrests. If you are certified in CPR, and are the nearest person to an event, you will be alerted so you can start CPR in the critical lifesaving minutes before EMS teams arrive.

Meridian was 1 of 5 Treasure Valley Fire Departments that sponsored and participated in a 14-week Joint Recruit Firefighter Academy. This effort initiated standard training, utilizing instructors from all participating departments and reduced overall cost to each jurisdiction. Another example of how partnerships are not only more effective, but also save money!

Our commitment to being a safe, 'healthy', and secure community is demonstrated in our *Healthy Kids Initiative*. Whether, it was the success of our first *weekly* Meridian Youth Farmers Market; or, the opening of The Boys & Girls Club's new Gymnasium and teen center. Or the Meridian Anti-Drug Coalition's campaign focused on kids achieving their 'natural high' rather than through substance abuse of drugs and alcohol. Or one of my favorites, Mayor Tammy's Walking Club, which continues to grow! We had participation from all of our public elementary schools, as well as some homeschool students. Approximately 6,900 students walked over 165,000 miles, equaling 6.7 times around the world!

Our *Healthy Kids Initiative* ensures our kids are getting healthy through their activities and forming good lifelong habits!

My next item is a weighty one. The Mayor's Youth Advisory Council (MYAC) is focused on the safety, health, and security of their peers. They are alarmed at the statistics of the loss of life to

suicide in Idaho and the personal examples here at home. They are taking matters into their own hands to tackle the stigma of suicide, advocate on behalf of mental illness, and bring better accountability to data on this issue.

One of their strategies was to create an environment of compassion. This is their 'call to action' to all of you. *Do The Right* will be held on Wednesday, April 12th.

You heard about it last year, and the year before. This year, we need everyone to step up and participate in this 'movement of compassion'. Take time on April 12th and do something nice for the person on your right, the neighbor on your right. Let's all be part of this movement! Let's *Do The Right!*

Strategic focus area 5 is ***Arts, Culture & Recreation***.

This might be the last strategic area but Arts, Culture and Recreation play an important role in our Meridian, MyMeridian.

Communities across the nation are finding, that the arts and culture sector and local economic vitality, are connected in many ways; improving competitive edge, defining a sense of place, and providing areas people want to go to.

Last fall, *Meridian Art Week* in Downtown was a destination for many. One of the activities was Meridian's 'Art Drop' where local artists, and maybe just people like me that wanted to participate, dropped 'art' of all kinds in our downtown. Finders keepers, how cool is that?

That week, we unveiled Daniel Borup's *Out on the Town* bronze statute located in our city hall plaza; and local high schools competed in the first chalk art contest creating historic murals that were stunningly beautiful. We're excited to see this week of events return in 2017!

Art can also create a sense of place. Soon there will be public art in Heroes Park. *Journey of Heroes* by Ken McCall will bring greater definition to this park by using the power of wind. This

art represents adventure, transformation, and change by displaying images of courageous individuals who have influenced history, and each of us.

And have you heard about 'The Hill' project in South Meridian? The collaboration is between the City, YMCA, West Ada School District, St. Luke's and the Hill's that donated the land. We hope to see the Meridian Library District and Western Ada Recreation District as future partners as well. This is an example of what taxpayers should expect agencies to do: work together, leverage resources, and provide places beneficial to all. This does that. You can get more information at this website and get involved.

The 'Y' partnership not only brought actor Matt Damon to *The Village* at Meridian, premiering his latest Jason Bourne movie; but the City also worked with the 'Y' to purchase the *Homecourt*. This brought 49,000 square feet of indoor recreation space, something our community has been wanting for decades. Pickle-ball, a favorite for our senior population, volleyball, basketball and others now have a year-round home, indoors.

Finally, an announcement about 1 of 3 parks we will build this coming year. Bainbridge Neighborhood Park, donated in part by Brighton Corporation, is a 7.5-acre park located in northwest Meridian. I am proud that this park will be given a meaningful name, the Keith Bird Legacy Park.

The design of this park will reflect the legacy Keith Bird has brought to Meridian. His legacy values *family*; so the design is multi-generational with activities for all ages. His is a legacy focused on youth and youth athletics. A large area of the park is dedicated to practice and play. The Keith Bird Legacy Park is a representation of character traits Keith has emulated during his decades of leadership and service to our community.

As I wrote about each of these five strategic areas, it was hard not to be proud of the accomplishments and these are just a few of many. More so, I was proud of the enormous number of people that work so hard behind-the-scenes, making sure we continue to be a BEST place to live, work, and raise your family. I am so proud of our Meridian, MyMeridian.

Each year, it is a privilege to honor a person that has worked year after year improving, promoting, and contributing to a great Meridian.

This year my Legacy Award goes to an individual that has believed in Meridian long before I knew him. He not only brought our city to the next level by building communities that people were proud to call home, but also business parks that created jobs and brought services closer to where people live. He is a quiet philanthropist, improving the lives of countless people - particularly children. He has donated land for schools, sponsored the turf at Rocky Mountain's football field; he has improved facilities for non-profits like the Boys & Girls Club. Brought the YMCA to West Boise and is now leading the effort to build one in south Meridian and so much more. Please join me in recognizing the 2017 Mayor's Legacy Award recipient, David Turnbull.

I'm grateful to be able to stand before you today highlighting all that has been done and what's ahead as we move our thriving City forward. This is MyMeridian. What are the things you love about Meridian? We want to see those pictures all year long with the hashtag #MyMeridian!

We live, work, raise our families and play in one of the best cities in the country – and that's not just my opinion! Let that sink in – one of THE BEST in all of America!

This is it, 2017 is here. And by the looks of it we're in for another tremendous year! Thank you.

**View the entire State of the City Address here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B-4WZqwZ4MA>**