

MEMORANDUM
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT



May 5, 2026

TO: Mayor and City Council
CC: David Miles, Director
Caleb Hood, Deputy Director
FROM: Brian McClure, Long-Range Planning Supervisor
RE: Downtown Overlay and Standards Status Update

Community Development Department staff last discussed the concept of a Downtown overlay and development standards with City Council during the February 17th, 2026 workshop. Since that time, staff, along with Council representation) have met as a Steering Committee, which also includes representation from the City's Urban Renewal Agency (MDC) and their architecture consultants to refine a proposed Downtown Zoning Overlay, identify a focus area for initial standards based on feedback, and begin organizing a participation process to support downtown, infill-focused standards.

Based on prior Mayor and Council feedback, and the steering committee meetings, staff refined the proposed overlay approach, including recommendations for the initial area of focus. The attached exhibits depict the proposed overlay boundary and highlight the initial areas of focus. The proposed overlay boundary aligns with the Comprehensive Plan Old Town designation and reflects logical extents for future code application. The expanded city core reflects prior Council and MDC feedback, including areas north of Carlton and extending south to Franklin. The proposed focus generally follows the existing Title 8 City Core framework and provides an opportunity to refine coordination with the Ada County Highway District related to streets and the public realm. These boundaries are intended to function similarly, while still allowing for subareas or unique elements (e.g., the railroad corridor) to be addressed. Additionally, the recommended initial area of focus also takes into consideration the area near Franklin as an entry point into the downtown area, and also limits the norther extent accounting for the current change in zoning of primarily residential uses. Initial focus is also anticipated to remain outside of the neighborhood preservation areas east and west of the City Core, which are functionally different from the original and expanded City Core.

The working timeline for this project continues to follow the three-phase approach, with elements progressing in parallel but arriving at approval times based on complexity and level of effort. As a reminder, phase 1 includes enabling code (creating the tool), followed by Phase 2 (defining Downtown geography and public realm emphasis) and Phase 3 (priority area standards). With available resources, staff expect this work to continue into next year. This phased approach is intended to keep both project management and Council decision points focused and progressing.

Staff have also initiated development of enabling code concepts in Title 11 (Phase 1), begun structuring potential standards (Phase 3), and started developing a stakeholder work group make-up and organizing the process to support future work. As this work continues, staff anticipate further refinement of standards concepts, development of draft code, and additional outreach.

The intended decision making and feedback loop for this process, is for a steering committee to oversee work, receive feedback on phase-relevant changes from appropriate stakeholder work groups and subject matter experts, and to consider other public comment and feedback prior to seeking Council approval (also a public hearing process). For example, staff would expect the UDC focus group and infill specialists to receive additional communication on code changes for Phase 2, and an architectural committee to be of special interest for phase 3. Other groups like Planning and Zoning Commission, Historical Preservation Commission, and Chamber of Commerce would be involved throughout. The public and development partners would also be informed of this process and be able to participate throughout.

Staff will continue to identify and engage relevant stakeholders as part of this process, with ongoing coordination with Council. Additional input may be incorporated as the work progresses.

Following is the proposed boundary including initial focus area, and also some additional details on the purpose and context of this project. Future Council action is anticipated to confirm the proposed boundary and overall structure prior to proceeding further.

Attachments:

1. Proposed Overlay and Priority Standards Area
2. Additional project Phasing Context

Additional Project Phasing Context

Based on what staff have heard from the Mayor and Council, areas of interest, focus, no rezones to properties, application to properties that are not zoned Old Town, and given resources and time, staff is confident that this process is the best approach. The phased work is intended to have discrete end points to help keep the process on track and remain focused. It is outlined by level of effort and requirements to make findings, provide sincere opportunities for outreach and to simply recognize the realities of the topics being discussed, their complexity, and time to arrive at recommendations for Council review. Most of this process has been staged based on the specific requested and identified needs by others, the current status of the Destination Downtown vision plan, to remain clearly aligned with the Comprehensive Plan, and to demonstrate clear process, with context, when contemplating changes to design review and express standards.

Following is a more detailed review of the phases.

Phase 1:

The first step forward is sometimes the most difficult, but in this case the level of work is seen as simple. Code changes to enable the Overlay tool are not complex, and key direction has already been discussed (to use the tool rather than rezoning properties). Something to be aware of in a future decision, is who can make use of the tool. Staff anticipate this to be City initiated only for defining new areas. While there have been mixed discussions on timing, resources, and areas of priority, and especially in the context of City Councils ongoing discussions with MDC on the Destination Downtown Plan, staff have generally understood support on the overlay approach versus the alternatives (currently fragmented zoning-based review, or rezones). This work could be submitted as an application almost immediately if not for the need to verify support with City Council and also prepare outreach materials for stakeholders and the public to understand the larger project and timing. Staff hope to begin work on communication materials after the May 12th meeting.

Phase 2:

Enabling the specific downtown overlay is both simple and complex. Establishing an intended boundary is simple so long as the City is adhering to other adopted plans and documents and remaining within the vision of the adopted Comprehensive Plan. Staff is hopeful that after the May 12th meeting, and based on previous feedback, that direction to proceed can be confirmed and work can begin in earnest. Changes may occur later based on new information or public comment, but the boundary itself is not new given the Comprehensive Plan framework and various Urban Renewal District boundaries. The complexity here will depend on future discussions with working groups and City Council (future meetings). Staff for example intend to require public realm improvements (sidewalks, chiefly) with new and redevelopment. It's a simple requirement given mission, vision, and values, and the resources already spent to make downtown Meridian attractive. MDC and City Council have discussed many other standards though, such as parking, which could also be integrated here or in the future.

Where things may get complex is what other stakeholders communicate and how much of Destination Downtown's proposals are integrated. There will be differing opinions regardless, but conceptually most of these elements should simply implement Comprehensive Plan policies and Strategic Plan related directives, and work to better the community without creating

additional regulation hurdles or create unreasonable costs. For staff, these are simply stop gaps to address existing expectations that are missed. There is no City or ACHD fee to pay for sidewalks on small infill projects later; either development does it or the public pays to improve it later. It would not be intended to exact this work out of existing residents with other unrelated permitting.

For architectural standards, and most site standards, work in phase 3 would be constrained to the priority standard area. Those areas outside the priority area but within the overlay would not be the focus of new architectural building requirements and could either remain business as usual or apply Traditional Neighborhood Standards (already developed) until some future phase.

Phase 3:

Standards development is the most complex because they are express standards. Not discretionary design review based on guidelines. There is no pressure relief for administrative review by staff when something is not working well, without another public meeting process. Not having discretionary design review, the complexity of design language, the desire for creative freedom, the understanding of perception and preference, and critically the environment that these standards are applied, building envelopes and the public realm, result in a longer conversation. This work phase is not starting last, it is either finishing last or holding up prior work, because it will take longer based on expectations communicated to staff and due diligence, for defensible recommendations. Several additional or several less blocks of area are unlikely to affect this work unless it creeps into dissimilar land use patterns west of Meridian Road, or east of East 3rd Street.