

To: Meridian City Council

Re: MDC Destination: Downtown-Design Standards Implementation

Dear Councilmembers,

As a result of the directions given at the August City Council work session, City of Meridian staff and the MDC planning team met to discuss and create an implementation framework. The framework is specific to the needs of the City of Meridian and gives Council the steps necessary to implement the suggestions included in *Destination: Downtown*. Though the framework consists of solid actions and recommendations, it is anticipated that there will be a need for additional discussion and refinement of framework items from the Council. This memo provides the Council with a clearer understanding of the proposed direction for implementation of the framework and memorialization of *Destination: Downtown* design standards.

Framework Items

1. Creation and adoption of a new downtown overlay district and transect respective of unique areas like the city core, railroad corridor, and more.
2. Determine if objectives regarding design are to be standards or guidelines and the process to administer review and approval.
3. Revise Architectural Standards Manual (ASM) documents to align with new downtown overlay design objectives.

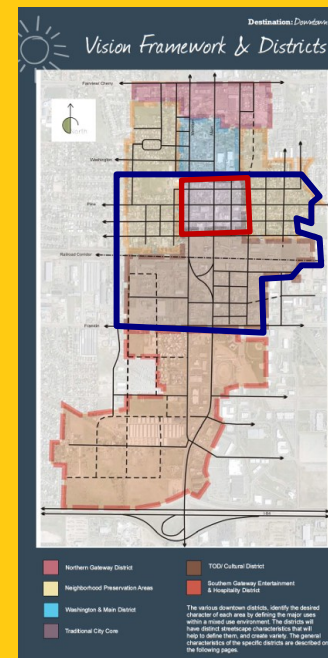
Creation and adoption of a new downtown overlay district and transect

The *Destination: Downtown* process revealed many thoughts and opinions on the areas included in the plan and where the true downtown exists. The community and stakeholders envision downtown Meridian as the city's heartbeat, evolving into a dynamic, authentic, diverse, busy, and identity-rich place suitable for a town of more than 140,000 residents. They described seeking a place with thriving retail, attractive public spaces, compact and efficient use of land, robust economic activity and fiscal balance, and a destination for locals and visitors alike. Given the growth, infill, and additions to the Old Town vicinity of downtown, it became clear that a renewed and agreeable definition and set of design objectives is needed for downtown Meridian. To this end, the final draft plan includes a larger downtown boundary than previous ver-

sions, with an expansion south of the railroad tracks to Franklin Avenue and into the neighborhoods both east and west of the Main/Meridian corridor. The intent of this decision is multifaceted:

1. Create a unifying downtown environment that helps forge a common identity.
2. Ensure existing uses and development are respected, but prepare for changes due to increased land values, demand, and the community's vision for downtown's future.
3. Follow and plan for the natural and incremental progression of growth, given that the traditional downtown core is mainly limited to redevelopment while also providing opportunities for quality infill in the near to mid-term.
4. Help ensure continuity for design motifs and elements that honor Meridian's past and support locally oriented community goals while allowing the downtown to mature into its next iteration of market-driven development projects.

Destination: Downtown Meridian Comparison



Above: Map of newly redefined Downtown
Left: Map of initial Destination: Downtown overall planning area and previous downtown.

Creation and adoption of the new downtown district continued...

The City must first choose one of two approaches to the question of how: rezone all subject properties in the redefined downtown or create an overlay that ostensibly does the same thing. After consultation between the MDC planning team and Meridian City staff, it is recommended that Council pursue an overlay.

If the future of downtown is intended to look, feel, and be developed in the image outlined in *Destination: Downtown*, then the next logical step is for guidelines that provide the direction for developers to reflect the future intent-this is the role of an overlay. The overlay method involves gathering public input from residents, stakeholders, business owners, and property owners, and requires a public hearing at both the Planning & Zoning and Council levels. However, the approach is faster to implement than rezoning multiple properties, and the *Destination: Downtown* process has already undergone significant public input at various events.

The purpose of the downtown overlay is to define the desired shape, building orientation and lot coverage of structures, address parking standards, ensure amenity and enhancement requirements, and touch upon many other key features. Part of the rationale behind the need for an overlay has to do with the City's zoning map that differs from the downtown envisioned in the *Destination: Downtown*. The zoning code includes numerous zones and, therefore, code requirements within the revised downtown geography. Zoning codes within the geography include Old Town, R-15, R-8, Industrial, and two different Commercial zones.

The overlay district and accompanying design standards will essentially reset the current regulatory environment, helping to achieve a successful future downtown Meridian as envisioned through public outreach, interviews, and vetted through market analysis and professional input. Once this action is taken, the design standards governing architectural features and elements can be further developed and aligned to ensure future projects have the desired look and layout.

An example of why an overlay and design standards are necessary exists in several areas, including the rail corridor. For many years, the city has worked to align the corridor with a pathway for pedestrians and bicyclists. This desire is now coming to fruition and may be transformative. The railroad corridor is a unique opportunity for

downtown Meridian. The constant presence of people means a potential market demand for unique developments. Future projects should cater to the pathway through building and parcel entrances, connecting pathways, and enhancements that embrace the corridor instead of treatments synonymous with the backs of buildings. Elements like height should be a distinguishing feature apart from the rest of downtown to frame the corridor and allow for a vertical transition to the rest of downtown. Public comments on height were favorable towards the concept of framing the rail corridor and less favorable to maximum heights being in the rest of downtown. Other features, such as rail corridor setbacks, green spaces, sitting areas, and outdoor gathering places, along with other kinds of enhancements, should be codified in code and permitted within the overlay to ensure development projects align with the plan's vision.

The rail corridor overlay concept can be part of a public outreach effort to coincide with the overall downtown overlay and be subject to the same procedural process with respect to the Planning & Zoning Commission and City Council.

Railroad Corridor

Below: Corridor rendering to illustrate possibilities for building orientation, pedestrian spaces, and overall development design.



Right: A latent demand likely exists for a dedicated railroad pathway in Meridian. The demand can spell renewed interest in parcel development along the corridor that takes advantage of the increase with the continual presence of people.



Determine if objectives regarding design are to be standards or guidelines, and determine a process to administer review and approval.

Standards are generally more absolute and stricter in application. Guidelines are general frameworks that are flexible and allow deviation. City Council will need to determine if the design objectives created to form the downtown area as part of the overlay are to be subject to standards that are express and administrative or guidelines likely to be more discretionary, or a combination of the two. Numerous elements of design will be included in the decision, like features that address parking, height minimums and maximums, building footprint, streetscape, open spaces requirements, and many more. Furthermore, a process will be required in the event of administrative reviews and approvals. This may involve creating a Design Review committee or a similar body, or it could entail an internal staff process to be determined.

Revise ASM documents to align with the new downtown design objectives.

The City of Meridian Architectural Standards Manual (ASM) is a prescriptive document used to ensure a degree of continuity among developmental design elements throughout the city. The manual includes permitted features and styles for different land use types and for zones and specific areas. Once the downtown overlay is adopted and any design standards are approved, a specific approach to amending the manual will be needed. This may involve adding a new section specific to the downtown overlay, further defining elements in the traditional neighborhood development section, or exploring other similar possibilities. The intent is to provide architectural guidance that aligns with the vision of the downtown overlay and its subareas, aligning with the vision of residents and stakeholders, and is codified within the design standards.

Additional Future Steps

- Direct City Staff and the Planning Commission to develop a work plan.
- Conduct engagement activities pursuant to the established work plan.
- Conduct a joint meeting with the city council and planning commission to review preliminary recommendations for feedback and refinement.
- Planning Commission holds a public hearing and provides a formal recommendation to the City Council.
- City Council considers adoption.
- Align planning areas and definitions between the City's Comprehensive Plan, Code, and the *Destination: Downtown Plan*.

Standards Versus Guidelines

Below: An excerpt from the current code illustrating standards language.

11-2D-4. - Standards in the old town district (O-T).

The standards for development in the Old Town District are set forth in this section as follows:

- Building height.** In the area defined as the city core in chapter 1, any new construction shall have a minimum height of thirty-five (35) feet and a maximum height of one hundred (100) feet. All other areas in the district, the maximum building height is seventy-five (75) feet.
- Number of stories.** Minimum number of stories for new construction is two (2) and/or as set forth in the "City of Meridian Architectural Standards Manual".
- Streetscape improvements.** Streetscape improvements within the city core shall be designed in accord with the "City of Meridian Public Works Design Standards Manual".
- Residential to commercial conversions.** Residential to commercial conversions within old town shall comply with the established standards set forth in the "Architectural Standards Manual" (ASM) and structure and site design standards set forth in Section 11.3A.19 of this title. Where there are site constraints that prevent a conversion from wholly complying with these standards, the applicant may submit for a design standard exception as set forth in the ASM.
- Public and other urban open spaces.** When proposed as part of a development, public and other urban open spaces shall have sufficient pedestrian access and be integrated into the overall site design.

City of Meridian Architectural Standards Manual



Left/below: City of Meridian ASM sections for illustration purposes.

BUILDING FORM, NON-RESIDENTIAL STANDARDS (BFS)		Ref.	CD	TND	IND
Goal	Incorporate visual and physical distinctions in the building design that enhance building forms, articulate facades, identify entries, integrate pedestrian scale, and visually anchor the building to the ground or street level. Applies to building facades visible from a public street or public space, and to facades with public entries.	①	•	•	•
3.2A	For at least 30% of applicable facades use any combination of concrete, masonry, stone, or unique variation of color, texture, or material, at least 10-inches in height, around the base of the building. May alternatively incorporate other architectural features such as ledges, facade reveals, ground level fenestration, raised planters, or landscaping elements within 3-feet of finished grade.	②	•	•	•
3.2B	Where building designs incorporate multiple stories, or multiple floor height equivalents, integrate at least one field or accent color, material, or architectural feature used on lower stories, on the upper stories.		•	•	•
3.2C	Building designs with multiple stories must provide proportionally taller ground-level facades adjacent to public roadways and public spaces. Provide floor-to-ceiling heights, or floor-to-floor from 10 to 16 feet.		•	•	•
3.2D	In mixed-use areas and for structures greater than four stories, design the uppermost story or facade wall plane to include material changes, horizontal articulation, and modulation meeting first story requirements, or include a patio, rooftop garden, penthouse, or strong architectural feature such as a tower element.		•	•	•
Goal	Building design should establish visual connections that relate internal spaces at ground- or street-level with facades adjacent to public roadways, public spaces, and along primary building entries, and that add visual interest and complexity to the first floor building design.		•	•	•
3.3A	Use horizontal and/or vertical divisions in wall planes, such as ledges, awnings, recesses, stringcourse, molding, joint lines, or other material types, to frame and accent 30% or more of total fenestration.		•	•	•