

PLACEMAKING DOWNTOWN

*Action Plan for Lighter Quicker Cheaper
approaches for the City of Meridian, Idaho*

PROJECT FOR PUBLIC SPACES & IDAHO SMART GROWTH

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Project Background

Ada County Association of Realtors (ACAR) and Idaho Smart Growth (ISG) developed a proposal for ACAR to submit a grant from the National Associations of Realtors to 1) enhance the understanding and implementation of placemaking in Ada County and 2) work with an Ada County community on a specific placemaking project. ACAR received funding and hired ISG to manage the project. The city of Meridian was selected for the project and ISG brought in Project for Public Spaces (PPS) to partner with them on

Placemaking in Downtown on March 19 and 20, 2015. The project intent was to take a fresh look at various initiatives and potential investments through the lens of Placemaking for Meridian's downtown. The focus was confined to the downtown core framed by Meridian Road on the west, 3rd Street on the east, Pine Avenue on the north and the Union Pacific Rail Corridor on the south. The view of the "Ever Green" property on the southern entrance into Meridian – where Meridian Road splits off from Main Street – was added as a special consideration.

During these two days, the Placemaking Team was briefed by city staff, conducted one on one interviews, participated in a walkabout of the focus area, engaged in a Placemapping exercise, conducted Place Audits and debriefed collectively in the creation of the Action Plan. The various participants included:

- Meridian Development Corporation
- Downtown Business Association
- Business owners
- The Arts and Culture Council
- The Library
- The Food Bank
- The Chamber of Commerce
- COMPASS representatives
- Valley Regional Transit Representatives
- Citizens
- City staff

We observed there are several individual efforts by these organizations working on improvements to downtown Meridian. Each knew the others well and from time to time collaborated with each other. In the pre-visit phone calls and in onsite interviews, each one expressed frustration with how sometimes they were working at cross purposes and were experiencing "planning fatigue." Priorities were not always aligned and sometimes, well-intentioned city regulations created to protect the public interests got in the way of creativity and potential activities planned by one of the participants.

What we heard regarding a vision for downtown Meridian was:

- Need more places to go downtown
- Need places to display art and culture
- Need to make process of showing art easier
- Bring the library back downtown

- Businesses are supportive of programming events as long as they don't block access to their businesses
- City Hall Plaza is underutilized as a public space and is disconnected from the rest of downtown
- Promote free Wi-Fi
- Downtown needs more places to sit and hang outside
- Need to find a way to bring more millennials downtown
- Downtown needs more night life
- Downtown has some strong assets, but they are spread out and disconnected from one another but parking lots, streets and other factors

The Placemaking in Downtown initiative is intended to create a game plan to focus each of the above participants around a central shared vision for what downtown Meridian could become. A unified approach would make their individual investments and programs better hit the target of achieving their individual goals. It would allow the various team members to better understand their role, how others would be contributing, and how all of the individual actions will fit together.

Fourteen sites were identified within this area for potential Lighter Quicker Cheaper (LQC) interventions. Each site is listed along with a suggested team leader, team players and potential activities. If the potential team leader was not in the room on the afternoon of March 20, an individual was designated as a conversation starter

Introduction to Placemaking: Creating Great Places and Communities

Great places and great regions are more than the sum of their parts. The Power of Ten is a concept PPS uses to start off the Placemaking process.

What makes places or a street great?

Simply put, a great place is one offering a variety of things to do in one spot—a place that is more than just the sum of its parts. These things can be very simple—a place to sit, a playground to play in, a garden to enjoy, art to touch, music to hear, food to eat, history to experience, and people to meet.

A downtown park is good. A park with a fountain, a playground, and a popcorn vendor is better. A library next to the park is even better, more so if the library featured storytelling hours for children and exhibits on local history in the park. If there's a sidewalk café nearby, a bus stop, a bike trail, and an ice cream parlor, that combination of sites and activities is what makes a place great.

If a downtown village had ten places that were great places, then there would be a critical mass - a series of destinations that residents and visitors alike could enjoy. If a city or town could boast ten great destinations (a vibrant downtown, a lively neighborhood, a great park, an active riverfront) then every resident would have access to outstanding public spaces within walking distance of their own homes. That's the sort of goal we should set for all villages and cities if we are serious about enhancing quality of life in our communities.

If a region linked its towns and cities together, with a focus on great destinations, active downtowns and welcoming natural features serving as connections, it could be the basis for a new paradigm of regional development that sweeps away the destructive pattern of more freeways, big box retail, and cookie-cutter subdivisions.

The Power of Ten and Placemaking approach gives people something tangible to strive for and helps them visualize what it takes to make their community great. It's the Placemakers' role to encourage everyone to think about what's special in their communities. How many quality places are located nearby, and how are they connected? Are there places that should be more meaningful, but aren't? Answering these questions can help residents and stakeholders determine—both individually and collectively—where they need to focus their energies.

The Placemaking Process

The Placemaking process allows diverse constituencies to identify how a public space or a street can be reshaped to make it a welcoming, well-functioning and attractive place for people. This approach is based on a belief that it is not enough to simply develop design ideas or regulations and rules to improve or develop a place. Improvements need to reflect community values and needs. A public involvement process that defines and responds to community conditions and needs from the outset is one of the most critical factors in achieving a public space that is truly vital to its community.

Thus, Placemaking must begin with a thorough understanding of the dynamics, desires, and conditions within a community. It involves looking at,

listening to, and asking questions of the people in a community about their problems and aspirations, then working with them to create a vision around the places they view as important to community life and to their daily experience.

Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper

Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper (LQC) is a *process* that helps create great *products* -sustainable places that highlight local assets and attract people. Say, for example, that you have a neglected park in your neighborhood, but your city or region can't afford the substantial cost of upgrading the space through traditional capital improvement processes. LQC is a way for communities and partners to think creatively about low-cost improvements that can be implemented quickly—like organizing public programs in the park, or a clean-up event with local volunteers. Even the smallest and simplest efforts can lead to big change. To be truly great, every public space needs long-term management and maintenance so that it can continually adapt to the emerging needs of the community it serves. Instead of planning places as end products, LQC celebrates them as ever-evolving works in progress.

The implementation of LQC projects can bring multiple and wide-ranging benefits to communities:

- Bring life and amenities to previously lifeless public spaces
- Break down resistance to change, while empowering citizens and community leaders who may have lost faith even in the *possibility* of change
- Generate the interest of potential investors, both public and private
- Establish or affirm sense of community
- Inform best practices for later planning efforts
- Create community buy-in
- Bring together diverse stakeholders in generating solutions and a collective vision
- Foster a community's sense of pride in, and ownership of, their public spaces

The “light” in Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper refers to a project's flexibility. An LQC strategy allows for experimentation over time. Places are always evolving alongside the needs and desires of the people that use them, and the flexibility of an LQC approach can nurture this dynamic relationship between people and place. An example of a “light” touch might involve a neighborhood block applying for a temporary street closure, or a small business owner or park organization opting for moveable outdoor seats and tables over permanent infrastructure modifications. “Light” is about making manageable and flexible improvements with little economic burden. Along with the satisfaction of seeing immediate results, this also means that if something doesn't work, there is room to try something else.

The “quick” in Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper means that to launch an LQC project, you don't need to wade through the numerous bureaucratic codes, approvals, or licensing issues associated with full-build-out projects. Further, LQC projects are not held back by long planning timelines since the design and function of the place is determined by user experience over time.

Rather than referring to a specific dollar amount, the “cheap” in Lighter, Quicker, Cheaper reflects a fundamental shift away from design-led capital investments and towards affordable programming and management solutions. Some LQC projects can be extremely cheap while others might require

more spending, but they are always *cheaper* than traditional public space design projects. Depending on the goals and budget of a particular project, “cheap” could be simply the cost of materials for making homemade planters to beautify a neighborhood sidewalk. On the other hand, larger-scale interventions may cost tens of thousands of dollars—still “cheap” in comparison to hugely expensive and time-consuming capital project.

Site 1: City Hall Plaza

Site 2: Parking lot between City Hall and Main St

Site 3: Parking lot east of Bank of Cascades

Site 4: Parking lot behind Harvest church and Alley

Site 5: SE corner of Main St and Idaho Ave

Site 6: Generations Plaza

Site 7: Idaho Avenue between Main St and 2nd St

Site 8: Idaho Avenue between Main St and Meridian Rd

Site 9: 2nd St between Idaho Ave and Broadway

Site 10: Centennial Park and Community Center

Site 11: Improving the linkage on Idaho between 3rd and 2nd St

Site 12: Alley and Broadway between Main St and 2nd St

Site 13: Main St across from the Mill

Site 14: *not in downtown core appears separately on page 18*



13 Sites within Downtown Meridian Core Project Area

Site 1: City Hall Plaza

There are currently some programmed activities here however it was felt by all the plaza should be used more. There were many ideas for additional programmed activities including a CableOne Movie Night or dancing to attract millennials back downtown but there was also strong interest in LQC that would invite people into the plaza for casual, daily use.

- Team Leader: Shelley Houston
- Team Players:
 - Library
 - Arts and Culture
 - 4H
 - Garden Club
- Potential activities:
 - Every Day changes
 - Chairs and tables and umbrellas in the plaza
 - Introduce food
 - Planters with flowers for color and to soften
 - Periodic social events:
 - Live After Five type event
 - Could include book readings
 - Open mike
 - Portable pizza oven
 - Bring CableOne Movie Night to City Hall



Site 2: Parking lot between City Hall and Main Street

This parking lot creates a visual and physical barrier between City Hall and the Plaza and the rest of downtown. Long-term plans are to move this parking behind City Hall across Meridian. This plan proposes LQC actions to tie City Hall and its plaza back to the activity on the street and invite people into the plaza.

- Team Leader: Shelley Houston
- Team Players:
 - Library
 - Arts and Culture
 - 4H
 - Garden Club
- Potential activities:
 - Remove a handful of spaces at the corner of Main and Broadway to incorporate and utilize the small open space that faces out to downtown. *Start small with only as many parking spaces as we can prove a use for.*
 - Create space to be programmed by MAC, Library, etc.
 - Food truck with table, chairs and umbrellas.



A mobile library is one idea for LQC use of reallocated parking spaces

Site 3: Parking lot between Bank of Cascades and MDC buildings, Treasure Valley Children's Theater, including the alley between theater and potential future library

This property is public property and as such has significant potential for LQC. There has been some effort to create a public space in the alley next to the children's theater. Many ideas were generated for how to activate this place and several saw strong potential for this to become a place for parents to be while waiting for their children at the theater.

- Team Leader: (Potential) Autumn Kersey
- Conversation Starter: Ashley
- Team Players:
 - Treasure Valley Children's Theater (potential lead)
 - Bank of the Cascades (stakeholder in parking lot)
 - Library
 - Arts and Culture
 - MDC
 - City
- Potential activities:
 - Parking Lot
 - Create space to be programmed by MAC, Library, etc.
 - Potential tie into Activity Nights programmed at City Hall Plaza
 - Alley
 - Seating and tables; promote Wi-Fi
 - Food, coffee vendors (small scale—perhaps by existing local eateries)
 - Fruit and vegetable stand



Site 4: Parking lot behind Harvest Church and alley

This is an important opportunity to foreshadow the future potential of the church as a performing arts center. As such, the primary emphasis of LQC here should be performances and entertainment.

•Team Leader: Ashley

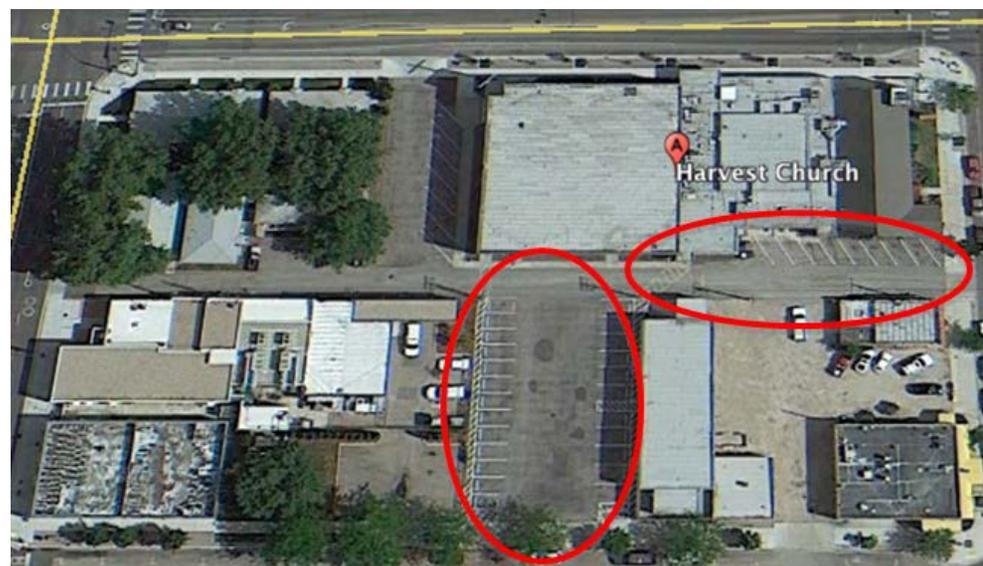
•Team Players:

- Hillary to reach out to the MAC and Library
- City Community Development
- Harvest Church
- Children's Theater
- Library
- Arts and Culture

•Potential activities:

- Create space to be programmed by MAC, Library, etc.
- Could be movie night, with old films and/or films about the history of Meridian*
- Create some shade cover, string quartet
- Children's theater
- School band and/or recitals
- Tie in with Ventures Parking Lot
- Find a way to activate the driveway/alley to bring some of the energy out to Main Street.

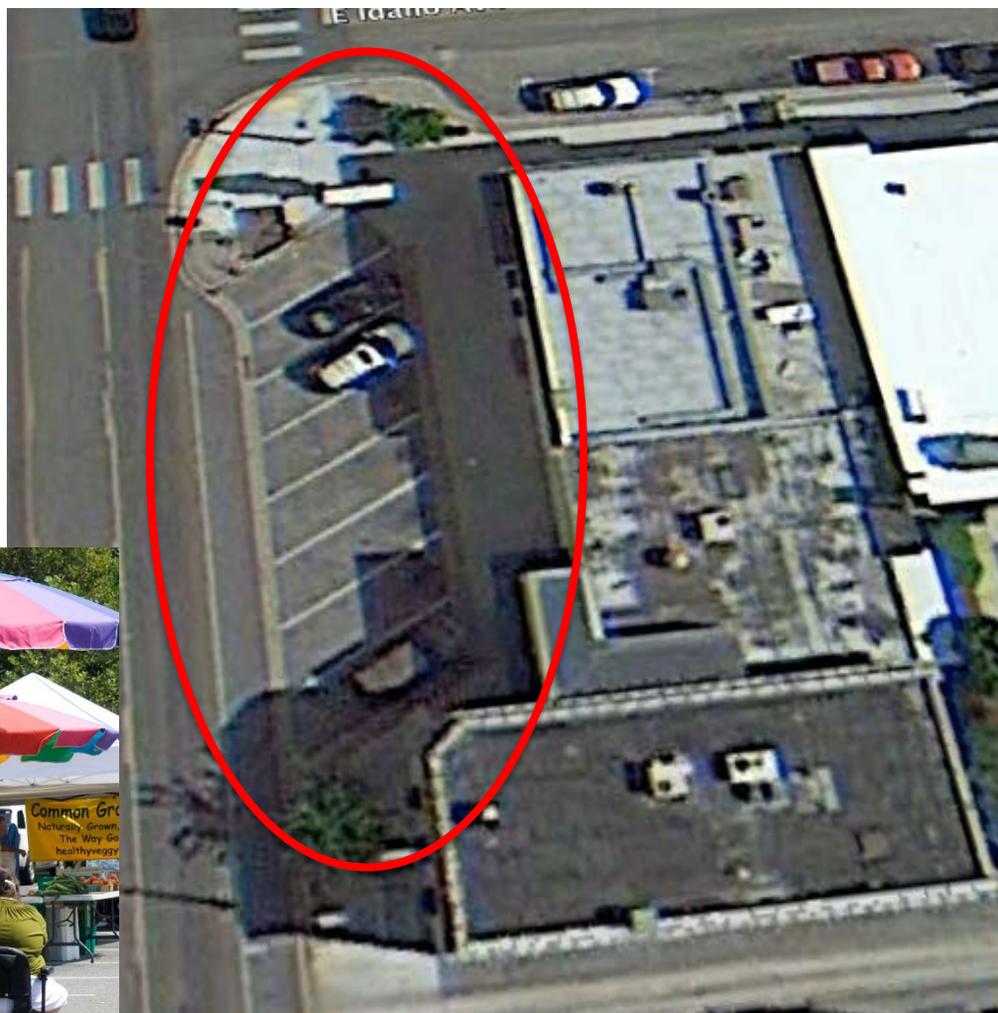
**Meridian already has a screen for the movies*



Site 5: SE corner of Main and Idaho

There is a very wide sidewalk at this location, combined with the angled parking spaces this space has good potential for evening LQC activities after the businesses are closed and they no longer need the parking. The idea was that this could be programmed periodically, for instance, once a month, perhaps with food and music. It was thought this could be a good location for some evening activities that would appeal to millennials. This site was not a high priority but the team should be mindful of the opportunity it holds and find a way to foreshadow future uses here.

- Team Leader: TBD
Conversation starter: Brian
- Possible Team Players
 - Idaho Independent Bank
 - Residences above bank
 - Attorney's office
- Potential activities:
 - Event with food trucks and music
 - Weekend parklet



Site 6: Generations Plaza

Generations Plaza is viewed by many as the center of downtown and the strongest place to connect with the DBA and downtown businesses. It already has some level of activity with the fountain during the summer months and a tree during the holiday season but as at City Hall Plaza there is little casual daily use. The LQC actions identified include both more programming and ways to enhance daily use and activity. The grassy side provides a natural little outdoor theater. Create connection between Flatbread's outdoor seating and activities on the plaza such as parents sitting and having coffee while their children listen to story time.

- Interim Team Leader: Shelley
- Goal for Ultimate Team Leader: DBA

- Team Players
 - DBA is the key player
 - Library
 - MAC
 - Grotto
 - Flatbread
 - Bike Shop
 - Boys and Girls Club
 - Historical Society

- Potential Activities:
 - More seating and colorful umbrellas that can move around
 - Story hour on the grassy side
 - "Cover use" for the very large utility box - chalk painting, tic-tac-toe, magnetic word wall, painted-on board games
 - the site needs more shade to be comfortable in the summer
 - Programming by DBA, library, Children's Theater
 - Lunch deliveries from nearby restaurants during the warmer months



Site 7: Idaho Avenue between Main St and 2nd Avenue

This block provides a great opportunity for LQC in the street itself. The street width could readily accommodate temporary conversions to uses for people to sit, eat, etc. without loss of parking or adequate room for people driving. This could be accomplished parklet by parklet as local businesses desire to have one in front of their storefront. A vibrant street scene on this block would create a stronger connection between downtown and large employers on 3rd and the downtown residential neighborhood east of 3rd Street.

- Team Leader: Caleb/Community Development

- Team Players:

- ACHD
 - Econ Development Program
- COMPASS
- VRT
- Adjacent neighborhoods
- DBA: potential educator
- Adjacent businesses

- Activities

- Rightsizing: measuring from Google Earth, Idaho Avenue appears to be 52' from curb to curb. Allowing for 8' parking lanes on both sides, this leaves two 18' travel lanes.
 - If the lanes are reduced to the industry maximum of 12', this allows recapture of 12' for reallocation to wider sidewalks and café seating.
 - It is recommended that the conversation start with the desire for reallocation by reduction of lane widths to 12', with a professional conversation about the future potential to reduce to 10' if the LOC experiment proves successful.

Temporary Parklet experiment in front of Rick's on Idaho Avenue.

Photo credit: Mavor de Weerd



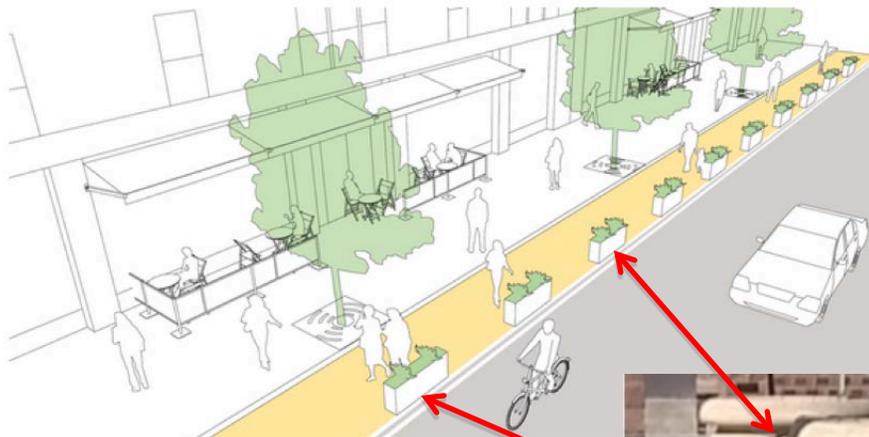
Site 8: Idaho Avenue between Main Street and Meridian Road

This is a continuation of Site 7 and suggests either reprising the parklet experiment in Site 7 or possibly extend the rightsizing LQC to this street. The first priority should be Site 7 because immediate benefit to creating a walking and lingering destination would be apparent; the ROI of rightsizing here is longer term. The timing might coincide with the activation of the parking lots on either side of Idaho. This might start with a parklet next to Sunrise Café due to their interest from the City's previous experiment with parklets.

- Team Leader: Caleb/Community Development
- Team Players:
 - ACHD
 - Econ Development Program
 - Adjacent neighborhoods
 - DBA: potential educator
 - Adjacent businesses: Sunrise Café



INTERIM SIDEWALK WIDENING



LQC Rightsizing could be achieved by reducing lane widths to 12', moving parking lanes 6' away from the curb, and inserting planters such as the ones MDC placed in Generations Plaza at the edge of the new space.

Site 9: 2nd Street south of Idaho

Construction of this new building included quality complete street infrastructure for pedestrians on a quarter block of 2nd Street. This area already provides some seating but needs more than benches to become active. Due to the two large employers at this location - COMPASS and Valley Regional Transit - and the room on the streetscape there is good potential for some LQC. Additionally the recently vacated parcel across the street also presents an interesting opportunity.

- Team Leaders/Conversation Starter: City staff and Rhonda Jalbert with VRT
- Team Players
 - VRT
 - COMPASS
- Potential Activities
 - Could include weekly food truck;
 - Tables with chairs and perhaps umbrellas;
 - Art on the fence across the street
 - Build a LOC streetscape across that street just outside the fence that could provide space for lingering and lunch;
 - Utilize the recent empty lot across the street to create a “beach” or similar outdoor space with moveable chairs, tables, umbrellas
 - Create some kind of LOC foreshadowing of a future water feature in the street or along the side
 - 2nd Street has rightsizing potential, introduce LOC that tests this for future redevelopment



Site 10: Centennial Park and Community Center

Both are underutilized facilities that LQC activities could help create more use of. The parking lot between these two facilities could be used for outdoor events/programs. This site is along the continuum of Idaho Street and could further tie residents and employees in this area to downtown.

- Team Leader: Meridian Parks
- Team Players:
 - MAC
 - Library
 - CWI
 - Local residents
- Potential Activities
 - Activate and layer in more activities;
 - Better physical connections between building and park;
 - Better use of the parking lot that stands between both places: potentially move parking out to the street.
 - Hold the summer food truck event in this location because the park provides shade.



Examples of possible activities: food truck, dancing on the basketball court, make your own playground, ping pong. Materials could be stored at the Community Center.



Site 11: Improving the linkage on Idaho between 3rd and 2nd streets

This could involve rightsizing of Idaho between 2nd and 3rd. We recommend making rightsizing lower priority until most of the other LQC elements generate an interest/desire for more. Early actions could include bringing the treatments on 3rd around the corner to Idaho and fun intersection features, until the community identifies desired uses for the reallocated space.

- Team Leader: City Community Development
- Team Players:
 - Parks
 - ACHD



LQC project examples for the intersections of Idaho Ave. and 2nd and 3rd Streets could include painting (see <http://www.cityrepair.org/>) or temporary mini circles and bulbouts (see <http://cycloviahawaii.org/events/hele-on-kakaako/>)



3rd Street looking north from Idaho

Site 12: Alley and Broadway between Main and 2nd Streets

The buildings along this section of street are in poor condition yet with some improvements this area could become more desirable. The alley which already has one restaurant with an outdoor courtyard has good placemaking potential.

- Team Leader: Hillary/Arts and Culture specialist
- Team Players:
 - MAC
 - Adjacent businesses
- Potential Actions
 - The western part of the alley has the makings of an artists' space and could hold an event similar to Boise's annual Freak Alley artist event.
 - Hang flags, canopies
 - Enhance the appeal of the alley so restaurants open their eateries out onto the alley rather than walling it off with high, enclosed fencing as exists today.



Meridian's utility box wraps are an example of street art but an effort in the alley would include an annual event to draw people in.

Site 13: Main Street across from the Mill

Former Frontier Tire building and the adjacent empty dirt lot is another opportunity for some LQC treatments. Sitting directly across from the entrance to Zamzow's Mill on Main Street it provides a great location for LQC activities that draw on and honor Meridian's agricultural history. Zamzow's has expressed interest in wanting to have classes or other related activities that inform people about the mill and their history in Meridian. Having an active feed mill right in the downtown is a unique quality the City should work to highlight and use as an asset in drawing folks into the downtown.

- Conversation starter: Brian and Ashley
- Team Leader: Callie Novak (needs to be asked)
- Potential Team Players:
 - 4-H clubs
 - Extension service
- Potential Actions:
 - LOC events related to Zamzow's mill, markets and events related to Meridian's history
 - Extend the theme of the antique store across the street with a flea market or similar



Site 14: Gateway on Main Street north of Rail Road

The view of the “Ever Green” property on the southern entrance into Meridian – where Meridian Road splits off from Main Street – sets the tone for the image as vehicles enter the downtown from the east. MDC has funded a large public art piece as the gateway to downtown on a green open space where Main Street splits off from Meridian Road. This traffic pattern presents a challenge to get folks into downtown.

- Team Leader: Brian and Bruce
- Team Players:
 - MDC
 - Ever Green
- Potential Activities:
 - “Clean and gussy up” the triangular green parcel formed by Meridian Road, South Meridian Road and Ada Street.
 - Enhance this gateway
 - Investigate a roundabout (long term)
 - Could an architectural feature be placed in these triangles that represents the history and/or identity of Meridian to make this more of a gateway?



Recommendations and Priorities

So many locations arose from the 2-day workshop with so many ideas we determined that some recommendations on priorities would provide the City and its partners some focus to help them get started. Of the 14 locations identified we have prioritized four locations.

- ❖ [Generations Plaza](#)
- ❖ [Children's Theater Alley](#)
- ❖ [City Hall Plaza](#)
- ❖ [Idaho Avenue Main to 2nd](#)

These were selected for their central location and high visibility and because they all are public property there is greater ease of implementation with the possible exception of Idaho Ave. Each site has a number of potential partners to help with programing and opportunity for daily activity.

[Generations Plaza](#) is our top recommendation as a clear choice for some LQC. The City owns and operate it through Parks and Recreation and here are multiple partner opportunities. Many residents see the Plaza as the center of downtown, there is some existing programing, it is currently used by some as a 'place,' especially in the summer when the fountain is on, and it has high visibility. All of these reasons make Generations Plaza a great place for Meridian to start implementing some lighter quicker cheaper placemaking. So many great ideas

came up for this location here are few we recommend as perhaps easy starts.

- ❖ Using the table and chairs the city has in storage put some moveable chairs, tables and preferably umbrellas in the Plaza.
- ❖ Talk with Parks and Rec about the possibility of some sand near the fountain to create a 'beach.'
- ❖ Work with the Library on a weekly story time for upcoming summer months
- ❖ DBA to work with local downtown businesses for participation – for instance Flat Bread could provide a special during the library's story time for parents to sit on their patio, other restaurants might be interested in providing lunch delivery to folks wanting to picnic in the Plaza, etc.
- ❖ Work with Arts and History to wrap the huge utility box with interactive board games/magnetic word art or similar. This could change from time to time so experiment.

We recommend [Children's Theater alley](#) as the second priority for many of the same reasons for Generations Plaza - it's centrally locate, highly visibility and is public property. Additionally this location has a ready group of visitors from the parents who said they

would love to have a place here they could go and wait for their children. The proximity to Generations Plaza would allow LQC at these locations to potentially fuel one another and together could begin to create a nexus of place in Meridian's central core. Some ideas that emerged for this location include:

- ❖ Coffee truck with a table and chairs
- ❖ Vegetable & fruit stand
- ❖ Swings
- ❖ Food Truck
- ❖ Table and chairs that nearby restaurant would deliver to or folks could take out and 'picnic' here.

[City Hall Plaza](#) is our third site recommendation because of its vast potential and close proximity to the others and it too is publicly owned. We recommend adding to the current programing to create more frequency but also deploy some of the ideas that turn the plaza into a place people can simply come and hang out. Here are a few of the simple suggestions to achieve this.

- ❖ Placing moveable chairs and tables with umbrellas for shade.
- ❖ Adding some simple activities such as games

- ❖ Highlighting a local restaurant here weekly giving them a choice to deliver or vend on-sight.
- ❖ Adding planters with flowers to add color.
- ❖ Add art to the bathroom doors for color similar to the utility boxes.
- ❖ Have the Children’s Theatre hold plays here.

Idaho Avenue is the 4th recommendation. This block presents an excellent opportunity important for the City and its partners to begin experimenting with reclaiming street space. Given the past parklet experiment, there is knowledge and experience for how to improve on this. The location begins to connect the downtown core to the neighborhood, businesses and civic facilities off Main Street. Both because this block is adjacent to Generations Plaza and because it has so much width to play with we encourage DBA to help the City work with the business owners along this block to generate interest.

- ❖ Reduce lanes to the industry standard of 11’ and repurpose 12’ to café seating, parklets, wider sidewalks, temporary landscaping, etc. using LQC techniques.
- ❖ Consider rightsizing Idaho Avenue. It is recommended that the conversation start with the desire for reallocation by

reduction of lane widths to 11’, with a professional conversation about the future potential to reduce to 10’ if the LQC experiment proves successful.

While we recommend these locations as good places to get started we encourage flexibility as you move forward and not allow these priorities to prevent good opportunities as they elsewhere. For example Rhonda Jalbert with VRT is very interested in moving forward on the lunch food truck on 2nd. Where you have someone willing to move forward the City, MDC and others should be supportive of such efforts. Another opportunity to begin redefining the streets would be to develop a street painting program as discussed during the workshop. This accomplishes three things identified during the two days. These intersection paintings are a great way to generate some “buzz,” engage the surrounding neighbors and simply begin to help with the notion of using streets for more than just cars. It also could provide another opportunity for the arts and history efforts currently supported through several of the partners.



WHAT MAKES A SUCCESSFUL PLACE?

Great public spaces are where celebrations are held, social and economic exchanges take place, friends run into each other, and cultures mix. They are the “front porches” of our public institutions – libraries, field houses, neighborhood schools – where we interact with each other and government. When the spaces work well, they serve as a stage for our public lives.

What makes some places succeed while others fail?

In evaluating thousands of public spaces around the world, PPS has found that successful ones have four key qualities: they are **accessible**; people are engaged in **activities** there; the space is **comfortable** and has a good image; and finally, it is a **social** place: one where people meet each other and take people when they come to visit. PPS developed **The Place Diagram** as a tool to help people in judging any place, good or bad:



Imagine that the center circle on the diagram is a specific place that you know: a street corner, a playground, a plaza outside a building. You can evaluate that place according to four criteria in the orange ring. In the ring outside these main criteria are a number of **intuitive or qualitative** aspects by which to judge a place; the next outer ring shows the **quantitative aspects** that can be measured by statistics or research.

SITE #: _____ Date: _____

 *Rate the Place*

COMFORT & IMAGE	POOR		GOOD	
Overall attractiveness	1	2	3	4
Feeling of safety	1	2	3	4
Cleanliness/Quality of Maintenance	1	2	3	4
Comfort of places to sit	1	2	3	4

Comments/Notes:

ACCESS & LINKAGES	POOR		GOOD	
Visibility from a distance	1	2	3	4
Ease in walking to the place	1	2	3	4
Transit access	1	2	3	4
Clarity of information/signage	1	2	3	4

Comments/Notes:

USES & ACTIVITIES	POOR		GOOD	
Mix of stores/services	1	2	3	4
Frequency of community events/activities	1	2	3	4
Overall busy-ness of area	1	2	3	4
Economic vitality	1	2	3	4

Comments/Notes:

SOCIABILITY	POOR		GOOD	
Number of people in groups	1	2	3	4
Evidence of volunteerism	1	2	3	4
Sense of pride and ownership	1	2	3	4
Presence of children and seniors	1	2	3	4

Comments/Notes:

 *Identify Opportunities*

1. What do you like best about this place?
2. List things that you would do to improve this place that could be done right away and that wouldn't cost a lot:
3. What changes would you make in the long term that would have the biggest impact?
4. Ask someone who is in the "place" what they like about it and what they would do to improve it. Their answer:
5. What local partnerships or local talent can you identify that could help implement some of your proposed improvements? Please be as specific as possible.