

2026 State of the City Address

Mayor Robert E. Simison

Meridian, Idaho

Thank you to Blue Cross of Idaho for serving as Title Sponsor. Your investment in this community is not just a sponsorship — it is a statement that you believe in what we are building here. And thank you, Mike, for that introduction. I do not always receive such kind words, so I intend to enjoy every one of them.

And thank you to the Meridian Chamber of Commerce for hosting this event.

Since 1990, as Idaho has grown, approximately one out of every seven chose to call Meridian home. Let me repeat that — one out of every seven. As Idaho grew by one million residents, Meridian grew by over 140,000.

Idaho is a big state. Fourteenth largest in the nation. Meridian makes up 38 square miles out of 83,557 in Idaho. So, with all that land in Idaho, why do people choose Meridian?

Is it our low crime rate, award-winning parks, or educational opportunities? Is it because we are a heart-safe community or that our businesses are expanding with family-wage jobs? Is it the small-town feeling we have, even as we grow? Is it because we save before we spend and carry no debt?

My family is one of the many who made that decision and the answer is yes. Yes to all of those and more.

Today, Meridian sits at the center of the Treasure Valley. Our story is full of chapters — from orchards to dairy, from the boom that brought families here, to a community now nationally recognized as one of the premier places to live in America. Our most recent chapter is the transformation to a true destination city. And today, I want to be clear about where we are and where we are headed.

The State of the City is Rising.

Not just growing — rising. Rising in the quality of our services. Rising in the ambition of our projects. Rising in the caliber of people who choose to live, serve and build their lives here. Rising in fiscal discipline, public safety, parks, downtown, and partnerships. Rising, even as we navigate real challenges. Rising, because that is who Meridian is — and who Meridian has always been. We have never waited for greatness to find us. We go out and build it ourselves.

That chapter is still being written. And the best pages are still ahead.

Over the last several months, I have traveled Idaho as President of the Association of Idaho Cities. I sat with mayors — many newly elected — and discussed why they ran, the issues they face, and how we work together to overcome them.

What I heard reinforced is no different than what I already knew:

- Growth must fund growth.
- Public safety is non-negotiable.
- Quality of life is an essential service that contributes to health, livability, and economic vitality.
- Strong infrastructure is the backbone of livable, connected, and economically vibrant communities.
- Cities with a plan, operating with discipline, focused on the fundamentals are cities that thrive.

This is and has always been Meridian.

City Council recently approved our 2026–2030 Strategic Plan, which incorporates these points. The mission, vision, and focus areas have not fundamentally changed since our first plan over ten years ago, which has guided every budget decision, new position, and project we undertake.

This is not a document we put on a shelf. It is a living, operating plan to prepare us not just for tomorrow, but for the next generation. Our departments are working on the tactics that bring this plan to life. This is how good government works — with intention, a plan, and clear accountability to the people we serve.

Every focus area is a dimension along which Meridian is rising.

- Responsible growth means we rise thoughtfully.
- Transportation and infrastructure means we rise connected on key projects.
- Business and economic vitality means we rise with family-wage jobs and a thriving commercial base.
- Public health and safety means we rise protected, with first responders who are equipped, staffed, and trusted.
- A vibrant and sustainable community means we rise with purpose and joy.
- And government excellence means we rise together — with your trust at the center of everything we do.

Trust begins with your money. Our Finance Department earned a clean financial audit — for the tenth consecutive year. I want you to appreciate what it says about this organization. It does not happen by accident. Our team operates with integrity, our City Council exercises

meaningful oversight, and we are guided by a principle I will never stop repeating: we save before we spend. *We have no debt.* And we intend to keep it that way.

To the Meridian City Council — your service has helped shape this community into what it is today. I am grateful for your commitment to making this the premier city to live, work and raise a family.

While Meridian is financially stable, we are navigating real fiscal pressure. Once again operational expenses are up across the board — software licensing, healthcare, insurance, energy costs and more. Revenues such as liquor taxes and utility franchise fees are projected to decrease by roughly \$600,000 next year for the city.

As new construction has moderated, so has building permit revenue. And legislative changes have cut revenue from new growth over the last six years to what is now approximately \$2 million annually. That is not a rounding error. That is real money that could fund projects and services and that number goes up each year.

This is precisely why we have been disciplined for years. We have held discretionary spending flat, made strategic decisions about when to hire and when to wait, and invested one-time dollars into one-time needs. That discipline is helping, but it does not eliminate the pressures we face as our costs, like yours, continue to rise.

Our Fiscal Year 2027 budget includes a request to take the 3% property tax increase allowed by state law, and I am requesting to take foregone revenue. I do not make this request lightly as I understand what property taxes mean to families and businesses. With increased costs, if we are going to continue delivering the services this community expects and deserves, then this is necessary for our long-term health.

What I can tell you with confidence: we are being careful, we are being prudent, and we will keep doing what we have always done — making every taxpayer dollar count.

I want to say something from the bottom of my heart: thank you. Thank you to the residents of Meridian who supported the 2025 public safety levy.

You did not have to say yes. You had every right to look at your property tax bill and say no. But you looked at this community, at the people who protect it, and you said — we believe in them. That act of trust is something our entire City team takes seriously every single day.

The levy will help fund positions in our future Prosecutor's Office — attorneys and staff 100% dedicated to Meridian. Having people fully committed to our city, working directly alongside our

officers, ensuring crimes are actually being tried — that matters more than most people realize. Enforcement without prosecution is not justice. Your vote is fixing that.

The levy also supports keeping firefighter positions, allowing us to staff four-person crews where needed. That is the staffing level that keeps both our firefighters and our community safe when the alarm sounds.

And it supports our Police Department's ability to be competitive in the labor market. Having filled positions means officers can be present in neighborhoods and on our streets taking care of the little things before they become big things. That is the Meridian way, and your vote made sure we can keep doing it.

Because of your vote, the State of the City is Rising — in public safety, in service, and in the confidence that Meridian will always invest in the people who protect it.

Let's talk about technology. Our Police Department has embraced drones as a meaningful part of our public safety toolkit. This is about giving our officers better information so they can respond safely and more effectively.

Here are a few of the things that happened on day one of using drones as first responders:

- Provided overwatch on a house fire to assist MFD.
- Followed a DUI suspect.
- Witnessed a family fight where an adult was battering his mother in the street. The suspect's violent behavior was observed by the drone pilot and shared to the responding officers, allowing them to pre-plan options before arriving on scene. This also produced important evidence for prosecution.

We are currently averaging about 12 flights per day with the drone being the first police resource on scene about 2/3 of the time among those flights. This is producing real, measurable results — helping our officers with information in the field to make better decisions and allowing them time to develop a plan which is reducing risk.

Additionally, technology is being used by our officers for real-time language translation with body-worn cameras. This is leading to efficiency and better communications with our community.

The cameras are also assisting with report writing based on camera footage. From initial efforts, the average time to write a report has been cut in half. That means less time at a desk and more time in the field responding to calls for our officers.

These tools have a cost. To afford them, the department chose to eliminate vacant positions from the budget. But the extra time in the field is an overall improvement with no reduction in service. The information makes it safer for our officers and the public, making the trade worth every penny.

As noted, these drones can also help our Fire Department to get eyes on scenes sooner, gaining a clearer picture of what they are being dispatched to. Situational understanding matters for teams arriving on scene where every second counts.

And speaking of seconds, you have heard me talk about the upgrading of technology to help our first responders get on scene quickly. Since the full implementation in 2025, Meridian Fire Departments total response time has decreased a full 1 minute and 52 seconds faster!

The Fire Department is also continuing analyzing data to identify the best location for Fire Station Number 9. Putting our next station in the right location is how we keep our contract that says when you call, we come – quickly.

But preparedness is not just about emergencies — it is also about prevention, what we call Community Risk Reduction in the Meridian Fire Department. Fire prevention is smart public safety education that saves lives before the alarm ever sounds. Our Risk Reduction team received national recognition for work that reduces emergencies before they happen. That is exactly the kind of investment this community deserves.

To every officer, firefighter, and public safety employee: you are valued. What you do is seen. The integrity and character you bring every day is what Meridian has always been about. Thank you for who you are and what you do.

In public safety, the State of the City is Rising — with smarter tools, stronger staffing, and a community that continues to invest in the people who protect it.

Now I cannot talk about technology without addressing what is on everyone's mind — from City Hall to the classroom to the boardroom. Artificial intelligence.

The honest answer is that no one fully knows what AI will ultimately mean for local government, our workforce, or the services we deliver. But I know this: cities that ignore the question will be left behind, and cities that rush into AI adoption without thinking carefully about values, accountability, and impact will make costly mistakes that erode public trust. We intend to be neither.

Our team is actively examining how AI tools can help us operate more efficiently and serve you better — whether processing permits faster, analyzing data for better infrastructure decisions,

improving how residents interact with City services online, or helping our public safety teams work smarter. We are asking the right questions and doing the homework before we act.

We are committed to doing this transparently and responsibly, with resident privacy and trust at the center of every decision. Any tool we adopt will be evaluated against our CARE values — Customer Service, Accountability, Respect, and Excellence. If it does not serve those values, it does not serve Meridian.

And here is the most important thing: no technology replaces the people of this community or the public servants who care for it. The right technology frees those people to do more of what only human beings can do — build genuine relationships, exercise sound judgment, and serve with real compassion. People first. Technology in service of people. Always.

In how we deliver city services, the State of the City is Rising — embracing innovation with values, ensuring technology serves our community rather than the other way around.

I want to talk about something years in the making as we broke ground on a new Community Center. Let me say that again, because it deserves a moment. After years of finding the right location, the right design, the right partnerships, and the right funding — we broke ground!

At 26,000 square feet, located in an expanded Settlers Park, this facility is funded by impact fees — which means growth is paying for growth, exactly as it should be. That is responsible stewardship in action.

When it opens, this will be a place where families gather, kids learn and play, seniors stay active, and neighbors build the connections that make a community feel like home. There will be spaces to stay active, rooms for meetings and classes, expanded programming from our Parks and Recreation team, and arts spaces — including a kiln and a stage. This is the kind of facility Meridian has needed for a long time, and a premier city deserves.

In true Meridian style, it includes partnerships. Our Fire Department will co-locate a Fire Safety Center within the building — providing hands-on, lifesaving education and prevention programs for residents of all ages from our community risk reduction team. We do not build things in isolation. We build them together, with shared purpose, for the greatest community benefit.

The expansion of Settlers Park also includes expanded green space and a parking lot funded in partnership with Meridian Youth Baseball. It has been shaped by years of community input, countless staff hours, and City Council members who believed in the vision. I am proud of what this represents, and I cannot wait to see it filled with the energy of Meridian families for decades to come.

You know what also has energy and is becoming more popular? E-bikes and electric motorcycles. While they may seem harmless, they are creating safety challenges in our parks, on our pathways, streets, and neighborhoods with unsafe riding practices that are dangerous.

I, like many in our community, want our youth to enjoy life, to experience, learn and have fun. But that means being safe and following the law. Enforcement by our police is difficult and unfortunately often results in worse behavior as people try to flee – especially our youth. So, if you are the parent of a youth with an e-bike or electric motorcycle, I am asking you to have serious conversations and understand what your children are doing on these machines to keep them and our community safe.

With the Community Center, the State of the City is Rising — lifting our quality of life, bringing families together, and delivering on a goal years in the making.

Now I know what some of you are thinking. "Mayor, how are you going to top the community center?" Well, I am going to talk about poop, or what we call biosolids. Stay with me on this one, because it is genuinely impressive.

Our Wastewater Resource Recovery Facility soon will put into service our new Thermally Enhanced Solar Greenhouse Biosolids Dryer. That is a mouthful — but what this facility does is remarkable, and how it came to be is a textbook example of smart government.

Every home and business in Meridian sends wastewater to the plant. After treatment, what remains are biosolids that must be disposed of. For years, that meant loading them into trucks and hauling them to a landfill. Frequently. At real cost. With tangible environmental impact.

Our new dryer will use solar energy — functioning like a greenhouse — combined with heated floor plates powered by biogas, the naturally occurring byproduct of the treatment process itself. The result: it will evaporate approximately 18 tons of water per day from those solids, reducing moisture content by 94 percent. This means dramatically fewer trips to the landfill. Less fuel. Fewer emissions. Less road wear. Reduced staff time. And an extended lifespan for the regional landfill.

The financial result? Our businesses and residents will save approximately \$300,000 every year in disposal fees and hauling costs. This project was funded with one-time ARPA dollars, reducing costs for ratepayers. That is not luck. That is planning — the kind of innovative, fiscally responsible thinking our Public Works team brings to work every day.

The work they do is not glamorous. Most people never think about the wastewater treatment plant until something goes wrong — and thanks to our team, rarely do things go wrong. I am proud of every person in that department. They are always looking for ways to work smarter, serve better, and cost less — for all of us.

In Public Works, the State of the City is Rising — using innovation and renewable energy to deliver essential services smarter, cleaner, and at less cost to residents.

Despite how cool biosolids are, want to know what has me really energized about the future of Meridian? Our downtown.

In April, we received outstanding news when Pacific Companies and Ahlquist became the new owners of what is now known as Heritage Square — the site directly across from City Hall that has waited too long for its moment. I have watched this site with patience and hope from my office — everyday. Having the combined forces of these two companies — with their proven track records in Meridian, throughout the Treasure Valley, and beyond — has me more optimistic about this block and downtown than ever before. This is the right team, at the right time, for the right project.

Heritage Square will bring residential, commercial, office space, structured parking, and community gathering spaces. The development team has begun the work on building and site design, the vision of a festival street, and the public-private partnership framework needed to bring this vision to life. When complete, it will serve as the cornerstone for the next round of investment and set the standard for what downtown Meridian can become.

For this project to move from stalled buildings to a vibrant urban core with public infrastructure improvements to benefit downtown, it will need urban renewal. To fully maximize this opportunity, we may need to close the existing Union 93 District and establish a new district that continues energizing our downtown while setting the stage for conversations about its future role. Ultimately, we all want a thriving, walkable, investable downtown that reflects the character and ambition of Meridian that this project will deliver.

And that conversation may include a performing arts space if that is what our community wants. If the appetite is real, we need honest conversations with our businesses, philanthropic partners, and local government about what is possible. The Meridian Development Corporation is currently examining opportunities, and I am committed to those conversations.

Downtown's greatest days are not behind us. They are rising up right in front of us.

And it is not just happening downtown — it is happening throughout our community. This morning I participated in the groundbreaking for St. Alphonsus' newest facility in north Meridian.

Ten Mile continues to rise with another 100,000 square foot office building at Ten Mile Crossing and the District at Ten Mile springing to life on the other side of the street. These projects are

creating vibrant, mixed-use development that blends residential, commercial, and employment opportunities, enhancing the quality of life and driving economic growth.

Our retail and entertainment options continue to flourish. The Village is expanding with new retail options and one of my favorite restaurants, Capital Grille. I did mention I'd like a Capital Grille 18 years ago when the Village first met with the City before I became Mayor. Not sure why they finally listened to my suggestion, but I will take it!

We have a concert facility ready to move forward at Eagle View Landing, Roaring Springs opened a new slide, and Wahooz will be breaking ground on an indoor karting facility next door.

Businesses are rising in Meridian. And with the Chamber's leadership, we are still working on the Auditorium District of Meridian — with the goal of having enough signatures for the May 2027 election. If you want a large-scale, flexible indoor venue for sports, recreation, or high school graduations, if you live in the district sign the petition or get involved to make this vision a reality.

To the Chamber Board, staff, and Sean — our partnership grows with each passing year. What you do every day on behalf of our local businesses is not taken for granted. You are advocates, connectors, and community builders. You keep the engine running on Main Street, and that matters deeply to all of us. Thank you.

The City and our local business partners aren't the only ones investing in Meridian's future — our local government partners are getting it done too.

West Ada School District continues to lead the state in academic outcomes, and they are just as focused on what comes after graduation. West Ada has secured a building on Locust Grove Road to house a new Career Technical Education center — one that will give our students hands-on access to some of the most in-demand programs today, but the flexibility to modify the facility as needs change.

With renovations set to get underway and a planned opening in fall of 2027, this facility will continue to expand options for our students. It's the kind of investment that connects our classrooms directly to our local economy and keeps talented young people right here in Meridian.

The Meridian Library District is also delivering on their commitment to our community. The South Meridian Pinnacle branch has been a tremendous addition, and it also helps ensure continued access to services while our beloved Cherry Lane branch undergoes long-overdue renovations. As the cornerstone of our community for decades and when those renovations are complete, Cherry Lane will be ready to serve the next generation of Meridian families. Thank

you to the library trustees and the residents who several years ago said yes to investing in these vital services.

And finally — WARD. I have talked about this for years, and I am proud to say that you, the voters, spoke clearly just a few weeks ago. With the approval of the ballot initiative to dissolve the Western Ada Recreation District, we have accomplished something meaningful: we removed a separate property tax burden from Meridian residents while ensuring the services you expect — the pool, the golf course, the amenities — continue under City management. I want to thank Chairman Shaun Wardle and the entire WARD board for their collaboration throughout this process and good luck in retirement.

This is what good government looks like as together we rise up as partners to take on the challenges we face to deliver services to the community we all serve.

You have heard me talk about transportation and you will keep hearing about it — because our residents have made clear in survey after survey that it is the number one issue affecting their daily quality of life. I hear every one of you who has sat in traffic on Eagle Road or at a four-way stop. And we are working on it with our partners at the Ada County Highway District who manage most of the roads throughout our community.

The Linder Road Overpass — our number one transportation priority for years — is about to begin its final phase of construction. Soon, steel will soon span the Interstate, Linder Road will be widened, and safety features will be put in place for this project expected to open in fall 2027.

Not to be outdone, the Idaho Transportation Department — who is also part of the Linder Road Overpass project — will be opening the extension of Highway 16 in 2027, with access points at Franklin, Ustick, and Chinden.

These two projects are gamechangers that will reshape how people move throughout Meridian and the entire Treasure Valley. I am grateful for the sustained partnerships with ACHD and ITD making these transportation improvements possible.

In south Meridian, we will see road capacity and safety improvements along Meridian Road from Victory to Columbia. Once again, a STAR agreement is enabling road expansions to be built faster, at lower cost, and funded by new commercial development. This will be the third state highway to benefit from a law championed by House Speaker Mike Moyle nearly 20 years ago. We are grateful for that tool and the results it delivers in our community.

In north Meridian, Ada County Highway District is actively working along Ustick to provide a safe connection to Owyhee High School. I know road construction is frustrating and it takes longer

than any of us would like. The detours today are absolutely worth it when those barriers come down and those roads open up.

But here is what I want to leave you with on transportation: we cannot only plan for today or next year. We must be thinking ten, twenty-five, and fifty years ahead. As the center of the Treasure Valley — where all roads and rail come through — we have a responsibility to focus on the large-scale planning that will serve everyone from Mountain Home to Ontario for generations to come.

Keep Idaho Moving is not a slogan. It is a serious, sustained commitment to the transportation needs of our valley being led by our business community. We have more needs than money and must examine all forms of transportation. This is not just about moving people. It is about quality-of-life issues such as getting people home for family dinner, and affordability for those who want to live in Meridian. I will keep advocating for that investment every day, at every level of government, because Meridian cannot rise, if people cannot move to or through it.

Now I want to talk about one of my favorite topics: the Idaho State Legislature. And I am going to be direct — because that is what you deserve and how I operate.

The Legislature this session made decisions that genuinely hurt our businesses, residents, and cities. Much of what they considered was driven more by politics than policy and the practical effects made our jobs harder and your lives more complicated, without meaningful benefit in return.

This year, they once again reduced funding to cities — dollars we use to pay for police officers, firefighters, parks staff, and support personnel who serve you every day. They made decisions about what types of residential units can be built in communities of 10,000 or more while removing the public from conversations. I do not believe that is what Idahoans want or expect.

Our Police Department already works with Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and the Legislature spent significant time pushing them to take additional steps on immigration enforcement. These were costly recommendations that would have pulled officers away from the community policing work that makes Meridian one of the safest cities in the state.

At the same time, in the very same session, they eliminated the registration sticker requirement from license plates — one of the very tools our officers used to deter illegal activity and pursue accountability. You cannot ask local law enforcement to do more, then take away the tools that made the work possible in the first place.

As important, here is what they did not do:

- They did not fix the funding formula for cities — which means growth does not fund growth, the way our residents want.
- They did not address the future of ICOM, perhaps missing out on a once in a lifetime opportunity, or the need to relocate the Idaho State Police facility so ISU can expand to meet our growing health care needs.
- They did not address Kratom — a substance linked to addiction and real harm — allowing it to continue to be sold without meaningful restriction in our communities.
- They did not declare rats a public health nuisance leaving others without clear legal authority to take action.

These are some of the policy failures that our communities are paying the price for. This is not accountability and making it harder to deliver the services you expect and fund with your tax dollars. As a state and community, we all deserve better.

Despite the lack of support for our needs, Meridian will adapt. We will advocate and push forward with our local government partners. That is what we did when we sent a letter last week to the Ada County Commissioners encouraging them to authorize a temporary levy to start addressing the issue of rats under their existing authority. Because that is what rising cities do, we get to work.

Even with legislative headwinds, the State of the City is Rising — because Meridian does not wait for permission to be premier.

This year, our nation celebrates a milestone that comes only once— the 250th anniversary of the United States of America.

There is something powerful about pausing to reflect on what this nation has been, what it is today, and what it can still become. We have had our struggles — every generation has. But this country was built on the belief that free people, working together in their communities, can govern themselves and build something worth passing on. That belief has never been easy to live up to. It has required sacrifice, compromise, hard work, and the willingness to remain committed to each other even when it is difficult.

Meridian is proof of that belief in action. We are a city of people who chose to be here — who work hard, raise families, volunteer in schools and churches, coach youth sports, build businesses, and look out for our neighbors. That is the American story, playing out every single day in our 38 square miles.

I want to encourage all of us to find meaningful ways to mark this anniversary — in our neighborhoods, schools, faith communities, and businesses. Celebrate what it means to be an American. Celebrate what it means to be from Meridian. Teach your children what this anniversary represents — not just as a historical fact, but as a living responsibility.

The freedoms we enjoy were not and are not free. They were earned by generations who believed in something bigger than themselves, and it is our turn to honor that. Meridian has always been a place where people can come together. This anniversary gives us another reason to remember that we are, at our core, neighbors, Americans, and we are in this together.

As a community rooted in American values, the State of the City is Rising to meet this milestone — honoring our past while building a future worthy of it.

Speaking of our future, let's take a moment to hear from this year's City of Meridian scholarship winners.

Congratulations to these outstanding students and thank you to the sponsors of this event who are helping to fund these scholarships. I also want to congratulate Mountain View High School, winners of the 2026 Watertower Championship! Go Mavs and Horns Up!

Each year at this event, I have the honor of recognizing someone who has made Meridian better and is creating a legacy in our community. Someone whose name may not be on building or in headlines, but whose fingerprints are helping us rise.

This year's recipient would be the first to acknowledge it is the work of the team, more than him. Since its opening in 2018, the Idaho College of Osteopathic Medicine has been building a legacy one student at a time. Having just graduated their fifth class, they have educated 734 physicians making a difference in Meridian and communities throughout Idaho.

One man has been there since ICOM's inception — committed to its success, but also to its partners in Idaho State University, the State of Idaho, and the City of Meridian. He cares deeply about healthcare quality and is committed to ensuring a rising future in Meridian as the heart of healthcare in Idaho. Please join me in presenting this year's Legacy Award to Dr. Tracy Farnsworth, President and CEO of ICOM.

[PAUSE FOR AWARD PRESENTATION AND RECIPIENT REMARKS]

Tracy, you are leaving a legacy. Meridian is better, and our future is brighter, because of the choices you made to serve.

Before I conclude, I want to take a moment and recognize the Honorable Dirk Kempthorne - Mayor, Senator, Governor, Secretary and citizen. His passing was on my heart through much of the time I spent working on this speech. Our conversations and his legacy spoke to me as a reminder of what we need to do to fight for our communities, our state, our nation — but most importantly to care for our people. *Esto Perpetua.*

I also want to recognize my family who are with us today — Ethan, Natalie, Ryan and my wife Jenny. They keep me grounded when I need it the most and get to eat a lot of pizza because dad has a work thing. Thank you for your support, grace and love.

Now, let me bring it home.

Meridian is special — and every day I have the privilege of serving, that belief is not just confirmed, it is deepened. Not by the projects and plans and budgets alone, but by the people. By all of you.

We have an extraordinary team at the City of Meridian. More than 600 employees who show up every day guided by our CARE values — Customer Service, Accountability, Respect, and Excellence — delivering services the Meridian Way. To the employees here today — and to those on shift who cannot be here — thank you. You are the reason this city works.

Whether it is a 911 response at two in the morning, a park reservation on a Tuesday afternoon, clean water from the tap, or a family navigating a building permit for the first time — our team does it the Meridian Way with professionalism, speed, and genuine heart. Because these are not just services to us. They are proof of a city striving every day to be — and remain — the premier City in Idaho.

Over the last year, here is the state of our city simply stated: we broke ground on a community center years in the making; the Linder Road Overpass is rising from the ground after years of advocacy; a new biosolids dryer will be saving ratepayers \$300,000 a year through innovation and renewable energy; downtown is on the verge of its most transformative chapter; police officers are using technology to protect our community more effectively; our fire department earned a national award for prevention work that keeps families safe before an emergency ever happens; and we have a clean financial audit — ten years running — with a debt-free balance sheet.

Do we have challenges? Absolutely. The Legislature continues to test our fiscal resilience. The cost of delivering services keeps climbing. The demands on our public safety resources grow with every family that chooses Meridian as home. These are real, and I will never pretend otherwise.

But here is what I know more deeply than ever about Meridian: we do not shy away from hard work or wait for someone else to solve our problems. We look at a challenge and dig in. Every single time. It is how this community has responded to every obstacle we have ever faced. It is in the DNA of a place that went from dairy farms to destination city in a single generation. We have always risen to meet the moment. That is exactly what we are doing right now.

We are the center of the Treasure Valley. We are one of the fastest-growing cities in Idaho. We are park-rich, economically vibrant, and community-strong. We are a safe city that takes care of its residents and your finances. We honor our past and boldly build toward our future. And we are a city where the people — all of you — continue to show up, invest, vote, volunteer, build, and believe.

The State of the City is Rising — and I am confident our future is as bright as the vision we share to be the west's premier community to live, work and raise a family.

Thank you and God bless.