

AN ADVISORY SERVICES PANEL REPORT

Downtown Meridian Mississippi



Urban Land
Institute

Downtown Meridian Mississippi

A Strategy for Redevelopment

June 6–11, 2004
An Advisory Services Panel Report

ULI—the Urban Land Institute
1025 Thomas Jefferson Street, N.W.
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About ULI—the Urban Land Institute

ULI—the Urban Land Institute is a non-profit research and education organization that promotes responsible leadership in the use of land in order to enhance the total environment.

The Institute maintains a membership representing a broad spectrum of interests and sponsors a wide variety of educational programs and forums to encourage an open exchange of ideas and sharing of experience. ULI initiates research that anticipates emerging land use trends and issues and proposes creative solutions based on that research; provides advisory services; and publishes a wide variety of materials to disseminate information on land use and development.

Established in 1936, the Institute today has 23,000 members and associates from 80 countries, representing the entire spectrum of the land use and development disciplines. Professionals represented

include developers, builders, property owners, investors, architects, public officials, planners, real estate brokers, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, financiers, academics, students, and librarians. ULI relies heavily on the experience of its members. It is through member involvement and information resources that ULI has been able to set standards of excellence in development practice. The Institute has long been recognized as one of America's most respected and widely quoted sources of objective information on urban planning, growth, and development.

This Advisory Services panel report is intended to further the objectives of the Institute and to make authoritative information generally available to those seeking knowledge in the field of urban land use.

Richard M. Rosan
President

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Cover illustration ©Laurin McCracken: The panel's vision for the city center plaza.

About ULI Advisory Services

The goal of ULI's Advisory Services Program is to bring the finest expertise in the real estate field to bear on complex land use planning and development projects, programs, and policies. Since 1947, this program has assembled well over 400 ULI-member teams to help sponsors find creative, practical solutions for issues such as downtown redevelopment, land management strategies, evaluation of development potential, growth management, community revitalization, brownfields redevelopment, military base reuse, provision of low-cost and affordable housing, and asset management strategies, among other matters. A wide variety of public, private, and nonprofit organizations have contracted for ULI's Advisory Services.

Each panel team is composed of highly qualified professionals who volunteer their time to ULI. They are chosen for their knowledge of the panel topic and screened to ensure their objectivity. ULI panel teams are interdisciplinary and typically include several developers, a landscape architect, a planner, a market analyst, a finance expert, and others with the niche expertise needed to address a given project. ULI teams provide a holistic look at development problems. Each panel is chaired by a respected ULI member with previous panel experience.

The agenda for a five-day panel assignment is intensive. It includes an in-depth briefing day composed of a tour of the site and meetings with sponsor representatives; a day of hour-long interviews of typically 50 to 75 key community representatives; and two days of formulating recommendations. Many long nights of discussion precede the panel's conclusions. On the final day on site, the panel makes an oral presentation of its findings and conclusions to the sponsor. A written report is prepared and published.

Because the sponsoring entities are responsible for significant preparation before the panel's visit, including sending extensive briefing materials to each member and arranging for the panel to meet with key local community members and stakeholders in the project under consideration, partic-

ipants in ULI's five-day panel assignments are able to make accurate assessments of a sponsor's issues and to provide recommendations in a compressed amount of time.

A major strength of the program is ULI's unique ability to draw on the knowledge and expertise of its members, including land developers and owners, public officials, academicians, representatives of financial institutions, and others. In fulfillment of the mission of the Urban Land Institute, this Advisory Services panel report is intended to provide objective advice that will promote the responsible use of land to enhance the environment.

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The panel also would like to thank Marueen Loftson, assistant for governmental affairs; Connie Royal, cultural affairs coordinator; Ken Storms, chief administrative officer; Don Farrar, director

of community development; Ronald Gaither, city planner; and Sharon Smith, main street manager; for their countless hours of preparation and assistance. The ULI panel members and staff truly appreciate their hard work and hospitality.

Special thanks go to the more than 90 community members who volunteered their time, thoughts, and experiences during the interview process. This group included government officials, residents, business leaders, and property owners. Their insights provided valuable information that was critical to the completion of the panel's recommendations.

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Foreword: The Panel's Assignment

At the invitation of the city of Meridian, a ULI Advisory Services panel was convened to evaluate the ongoing revitalization of downtown Meridian. With the redevelopment of Union Station, the conversion of the Rosenbaum Building into condominiums, the creation of the Riley Education and Performing Arts Center, and the reopening of Weidmann's restaurant, Meridian is at the beginning of a great transformation.

Background

Meridian is the largest city in Lauderdale County, and the largest in eastern Mississippi, with a population of over 40,000 residents. Due to its strategic location between New Orleans and Atlanta, Meridian once served as an important hub for trade, shipping, and industry—and was for a time Mississippi's largest city. Meridian has nine recognized historic districts and neighborhoods, including the largest collection of historic buildings in a downtown district in the state.

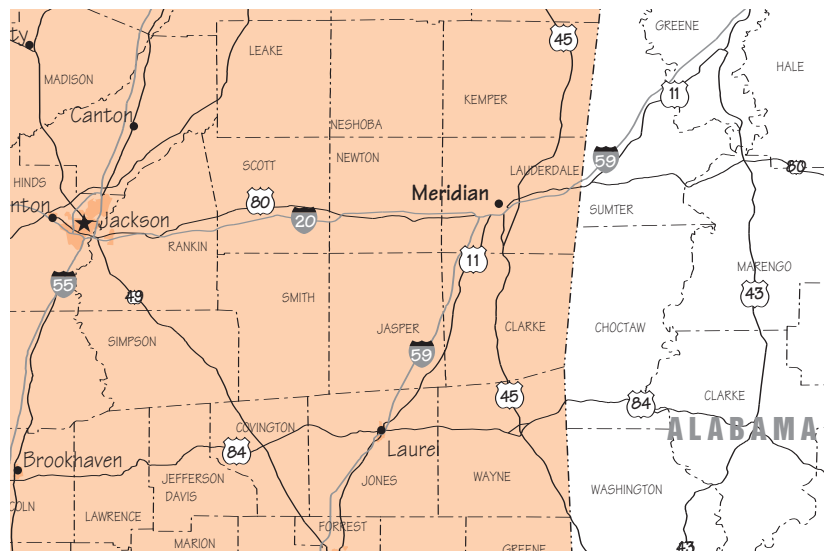
As a regional center for eastern Mississippi and western Alabama, Meridian is home to the area's major retail centers, cultural amenities, and medical facilities. The three area hospitals, Riley, Anderson, and Rush, are economic engines for Meridian and the surrounding region. They are the city's largest employers and draw thousands of people in from the surrounding areas for medical treatment. These institutions have a tremendous impact on the downtown area since they are all located within the city core.

The downtown district is slowly being reborn as a small influx of new residents and businesses moves in. While a small, stable group of businesses has been located in the downtown for over 100 years, recently completed residential projects are catalyzing new restaurants, shops, and services in the core. These are setting a foundation for its future growth.

Location map.



Meridian is a regional center for eastern Mississippi and western Alabama.



Mayor John Robert Smith shares his vision of the downtown with panel members.



Meridianites are in the enviable position of living in one of America's most affordable cities—a city where housing costs and sales taxes are well below the national average. The quality of life has historically been very high and continues to improve. The panel saw a lot of evidence that it is time for the citizens of the city, the county, and the surrounding area to come together to celebrate the many positive things that are happening in the community, and especially in the downtown.

The panel looked at downtown in relation to the area's overall retail growth. Meridian, like many cities, has experienced an exodus of major retailing to car-oriented sites outside its downtown. This does not mean that Meridian has no downtown retail. It just means that the character of downtown retailing is changing. Big-box retailers on the urban periphery contribute to downtown growth by providing tax dollars, and by attracting

customers from a broader geographic area. Meridian can take advantage of this by drawing regional visitors into the city's vibrant core—one that celebrates business, history, and the arts.

Meridian's downtown is unique in many respects. Its size, its wonderful stock of historically significant buildings, and its new and future cultural facilities are all assets to development. The downtown area abounds with opportunities for developers who can respond to the changing demographics of the nation and the city. These opportunities are as varied as the cultural development currently underway and projects that meet the residential needs of young professionals coming to serve in Meridian's burgeoning health care institutions.

The Assignment

The challenge for the panel was to look at current and pending redevelopment projects to determine which will have the greatest long-term positive impact on the city and therefore, where the city should place its support. The panel also was asked to investigate follow-up impact of the projects in terms of peripheral and long-term development; to recommend a strategy for redeveloping the African American Historic Business District; and to recommend additional downtown development to support the new cultural institutions. It is evident in the report that panel members addressed these concerns and went beyond them to suggest activities—both physical and organizational—that will benefit Meridian's downtown development.

Overview and Summary of Recommendations

Following an intense week of evaluating downtown redevelopment and interviewing many citizens of Meridian, the panel was able to frame several issues that pertain to the city core and to formulate recommendations. Panel members created a development and implementation strategy to connect and enhance the numerous pieces of the downtown revitalization puzzle. Their recommendations are summarized below and described in more detail throughout the report.

Market Potential

Downtown is beginning to re-emerge as the heart of the city and to claim its place as the center of arts and culture. It is once again becoming the gathering place for the entire community. With the redevelopment of the Grand Opera House and the completion of the new Riley Education and Performing Arts Center, a tremendous number of supporting services will be needed. Meridian is fortunate to have a community that champions such cultural amenities, and institutions such as Mississippi State University and the Riley Foundation committed to their stability and success.

The panel recommends that the Threefoot Building be reserved for hotel development should demand materialize upon completion of the Riley Center. The panel also recommends that the center's conference space be marketed and managed by a national hotel chain company. This will help to maximize its exposure and the number of users.

To capitalize on new and future development, Meridian must begin to strategically position anchor attractions in the downtown area. This will provide catalyst activity and will generate foot traffic between anchors. The expanded traffic will give retailers maximum exposure to downtown visitors. The panel recommends that the Jimmie Rodgers Museum be located between the railroad

tracks and Front Street at 26th Avenue in order to create an anchor for the southwest section of downtown.

Community Design

As development patterns have shifted nationwide to the edges of cities along major transportation corridors, Meridian is faced with the all-too-common challenge of revitalizing a struggling urban core. The city's incredible stock of historic and architecturally significant buildings points to tremendous potential. Meridian is fortunate to have strong public investment in arts and entertainment amenities. These will be key to catalyzing private investment downtown.

The panel recommends that the city consider changing the confusing one-way street pattern to the original two-way system to further facilitate growth and investment in the downtown. While this will require a significant amount of coordination between the city and downtown business, it is essential to revitalizing the urban core. The panel also recommends that efforts be made to create a distinctive entrance to downtown in order to give the area a stronger sense of identity and place.

The new 451-space parking garage will provide much needed parking for the Riley Education and Performing Arts Center.



Panelists Mark McConnel and Stayendra Singh Huja discuss downtown housing opportunities while admiring the renovated Rosenbaum Building.



Development Strategies

The panel recommends that the city of Meridian utilize its strengths to aid in downtown's revitalization. This means building on the unprecedented community support for arts and culture that is currently driving downtown revitalization, and building on the rich base of historic and architecturally significant buildings located downtown.

The panel has set forth a strategy to assist the city in its leadership role. This strategy includes the implementation of a Percent for Arts program to provide money for public art. The panel also recommends the creation of a downtown City Walk to link all of the area's cultural attractions, and presents a plan to revitalize the African American Historic Business District.

Implementation Strategies

Meridian has had measured success in attracting outside funding to downtown redevelopment initiatives. The Riley Center already is a tremendous boost to downtown revitalization and represents the cornerstone on which additional redevelopment can occur. The city must aggressively continue to seek outside funding opportunities from federal, state, and other regional sources, both public and private. National foundations, new federal dollars, and state and regional funding programs are critical to supplementing local resources in order for Meridian to realize its ambitious downtown revival.

Market Potential

Meridian is the largest city in eastern Mississippi and home to the region's major medical facilities, retail establishments, and cultural institutions. This critical mass of destinations, combined with proximity to a major interstate highway (I-20/59), offers Meridian an excellent opportunity to attract visitors to the city and specifically to downtown. With a number of catalytic projects currently under construction or in planning, downtown Meridian is on the verge of a great regeneration.

The role of the panel's market potential team was threefold: to assess local and regional retail trends and assess their impact on downtown revitalization; to analyze a number of redevelopment projects and evaluate their compatibility with the redevelopment of the Riley Education and Performing Arts Center; and to suggest compatible new uses. The team addressed these issues and recommended uses, timing, and development approaches for related projects, as described in this section.

The panel recognizes that the path to a successful downtown revitalization is lined with many challenges. However, members believe that with strong leadership, a commitment of time, dedicated financial resources and strict adherence to a strategic plan, Meridian can recapture its vibrant and celebrated history.

Threefoot Building

The Threefoot Building, constructed in the late 1920s, is Meridian's tallest building. This 14-story structure is currently vacant. A high-quality hotel that will cater to demand generated by the adjacent Riley Center, scheduled for completion in December 2005, is proposed as a reuse.

The panel has reviewed the studies previously prepared for the proposed hotel and has conducted an independent evaluation of the Meridian hotel market. The panel's conclusion is that a develop-

ment opportunity could materialize once the Riley Center is completed. However, no compelling evidence exists in the current market for a 200-room hotel.

Conferences and performances at the Riley Center are expected to generate future hotel demand. The panel has concluded that support from businesses, tourists, the medical industry, and patrons loyal to a specific hotel brand is likely to be minimal—if present at all—in the early stages of downtown redevelopment. Therefore, the Riley Center is the main contributor of demand. This represents a significant financial risk to the hotel. In general, the panel found that existing study projections for hotel demand were ill-defined.

Mississippi State University (MSU) projections for hotel demand generated by the opera and Riley Center conference events suggest that demand only exists for an additional 67 hotel rooms, assuming an occupancy rate of 70 percent. Figure 1 depicts this demand and also shows the level required to support a 100-room and 200-room hotel. The MSU projections call for 17,000 annual room nights, which would support 67 rooms. However, a 100- and 200-room hotel would require 25,550 and 51,100 annual room nights, respectively. A significant level of demand needs to be accounted for to justify more intensive hotel development.

Figure 1
Market Demand: Proposed Threefoot Hotel

	MSU Projected	Required Support 100-Room Hotel	Required Support 200-Room Hotel
Total Rooms	67	100	200
Room Nights Supplied	24,455	36,500	73,000
Room Nights Demanded	17,000	25,500	51,100
Occupancy Rate	70%	70%	70%

Source: Mississippi State University.

Figure 2
Competitive Set Trends and Forecast, 1997–2009

	1997 Actual	1998 Actual	1999 Actual	2000 Actual	2001 Actual	2002 Estimated	2003 Estimated	2004 Forecast
Hotel Rooms	839	817	785	795	815	815	815	1,015
Market Supply ²	306,250	298,032	286,694	290,175	297,443	297,443	297,443	297,443
Market Demand ²	200,878	205,480	188,945	178,655	182,611	182,611	182,611	182,611
Market Occupancy	65.6%	68.9%	69.5%	61.6%	61.4%	61.4%	61.4%	61.4%
Demand Change	–	2.29%	-8.05%	-5.45%	2.21%	0.00%	0.00%	–
Riley Center Demand ²	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Miscellaneous Additional Room Nights ³	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Average Demand Change	–	–	–	–	–	–	-1.50%	–

1. 200 additional rooms at Threefoot Hotel by 2005.

2. Room nights.

3. Projected 10 percent.

Source: HVS, Smith Travel Research.

Figure 3
Threefoot Hotel: Market Penetration, 2004–2009

200 Rooms	2004 Forecast	2005 Forecast	2006 Forecast	2007 Forecast	2008 Forecast	2009 Forecast
Available Room Nights	–	–	73,000	73,000	73,000	73,000
Percent of Market Share	0%	0%	19.7%	19.7%	19.7%	19.7%
Property Fair Share Room Occupancy	–	–	39,671	39,671	39,671	39,671
Property Actual Room Occupancy	–	–	51,572	57,572	57,572	57,572
Penetration	–	–	130%	130%	130%	130%
Yield	–	–	160%	160%	160%	160%

Source: HVS, Smith Travel Research.

Based on the most recent HVS report and Smith Travel Research data, hotel demand for the approximately 800 hotel rooms in the market has decreased an average of 1.5 percent annually between 1997 and 2003 (see Figure 2). The current market occupancy rate is estimated to be in the low 60 percent range—a “break-even” occupancy rate for hotels.

The panel cautions that occupancy needs to be in the low- to mid-70 percent range to justify new hotel construction. The addition of the estimated 17,000 room nights expected to be generated by the Riley Center, coupled with a modest increase of other demand (1,700 room nights) represents a total annual demand increase of 18,700 room nights.

This would increase the occupancy rate to only 61.4 percent.

In order for a 200-room hotel to succeed at the Threefoot, it would have to capture demand from already existing hotels. This is known as market “penetration.” The Threefoot hotel would ultimately have to penetrate the market at a rate of 130 percent to achieve an acceptable first-year occupancy rate of approximately 70 percent (see Figure 3). While the proposed Threefoot project represents a higher level of hotel quality for Meridian, this level of penetration is significant, particularly when the 200-room hotel will represent 20 percent of the market supply.

2005 Forecast	2006 Forecast	2007 Forecast	2008 Forecast	2009 Forecast
1,015 ¹	1,015	1,015	1,015	1,015
297,443	370,443	370,443	370,443	370,443
182,611	201,311	201,311	201,311	201,311
61.4%	54.3%	54.3%	54.3%	54.3%
-	-	-	-	-
17,000	17,000	17,000	17,000	17,000
1,700	1,700	1,700	1,700	1,700
-	-	-	-	-

The panel's overarching recommendation is that the Threefoot Building be reserved for a hotel, and that the Riley Center make a commitment to utilizing the conference space, food service, and other support services of such as a hotel to enable the project to move forward in a timely way. Negotiations should continue with the hotel developer during the construction of the Riley Center, and the panel recommends further investigation of the true demand generated by the center.

Development Approach

The panel offers the following development approach recommendations for the Threefoot project:

- Allow time for a track record of bookings and future reservations at the conference center to mitigate risk and ensure project demand;
- Target hotel completion for 2008, contingent on sustainable market demand;
- Develop the facility as a limited-service, high-quality hotel; and
- Explore joint management options for the conference center and catering at the Riley Center.

Another option for mitigating risk is to have the major demand sources step forward and guarantee hotel room nights. These could include the three hospitals, the Riley Center, and the city. A combined room night guarantee would act as a subsidy for the hotel if demand is lower than projected. This could be one option for MSU, as the university has indicated an immediate need for high quality hotel space for its users of the Riley Center. This kind of approach would enable the hotel project to move forward because any short-fall in demand will knowingly be subsidized.

Kress Building

The Kress Building is located adjacent to the Riley Education and Performing Arts Center. This building is currently vacant except for the ground floor, which is used as an activity center for teens.

After numerous interviews with the business community and public officials, the panel has determined that there is a high level of interest among various entities to relocate to the Kress Building. Their interest is based on the building's excellent downtown location and proximity to the Riley Center. Candidates include:

- A proposed magnet school for the arts (visual, performing, and culinary);
- An MSU Technical Research Center (expansion of an existing MSU medical program);
- An MSU hospitality and hotel management school; and
- The Institute for Southern Jewish Culture.

While it may not be possible for all of these prospective users to locate in the Kress Building, the Newberry Building (located between Kress and the Riley Center) is probably a suitable alternative. Regardless, their interest represents an opportunity to bring a younger population to downtown, depending on the programming offered. Further, the location of these entities in the buildings could facilitate a balance between the area's night-time population and daytime users by creating more reasons to stay downtown after regular work hours. Similarly, first-time visitors will be inspired to stay and experience the area's cultural and entertainment attractions.

The Kress Building is well located, only two doors down from the Riley Center. Its high ceilings and generous spaces are conducive to performances and rehearsals. Overall, the panel recommends that the chosen user of this building be one that generates pedestrian traffic and introduces a younger population to downtown.

Supporting Uses for Riley Center

Panel members evaluated the downtown area by surveying the existing retail and business presence as well as the numerous public projects currently proposed or underway. They concluded that downtown presently lacks the amenities and services needed to support the Riley Center and to transform the area into a dynamic entertainment district. The panel identified three types of support that will be necessary.

Functional Support

Once the Riley Center is complete and has established operational momentum, demand for a limited-service, high quality hotel is likely to grow. If such a hotel is developed, the panel recommends that the Riley Center explore a joint management agreement with the hotel operator for catering and events. This will streamline the operations of both facilities, and will provide each with greater market exposure.

The panel also recommends the establishment of a magnet school for the arts to support the center. The school will nurture the many young artists throughout the region and will draw them into downtown for performances, rehearsals, clinics, and other educational events.

Audience and Conference Support

The current inventory of downtown restaurants includes Café Latte, Weidmann's, and Jean's. Retailers include a men's clothing store, a women's clothing store, and a number of furniture stores. Most of these establishments close early and are not open on certain days. The panel recommends enhancement of the retail and service base, particularly of eating and drinking establishments, to service visitors of the Riley Center. Potential tenant types include, but are not limited to, restaurants and cafes with outdoor seating, clubs and pubs, delis and coffee shops, in addition to public open space.

The panel counted eight existing or future museums in the downtown area. While this has been crucial to promoting the arts and cultural history of Meridian, the panel feels it is time to redirect public investment to infrastructure (e.g., streets,

lighting, signs, utilities, etc.) critical to attracting and retaining downtown retail and services.

Public Support

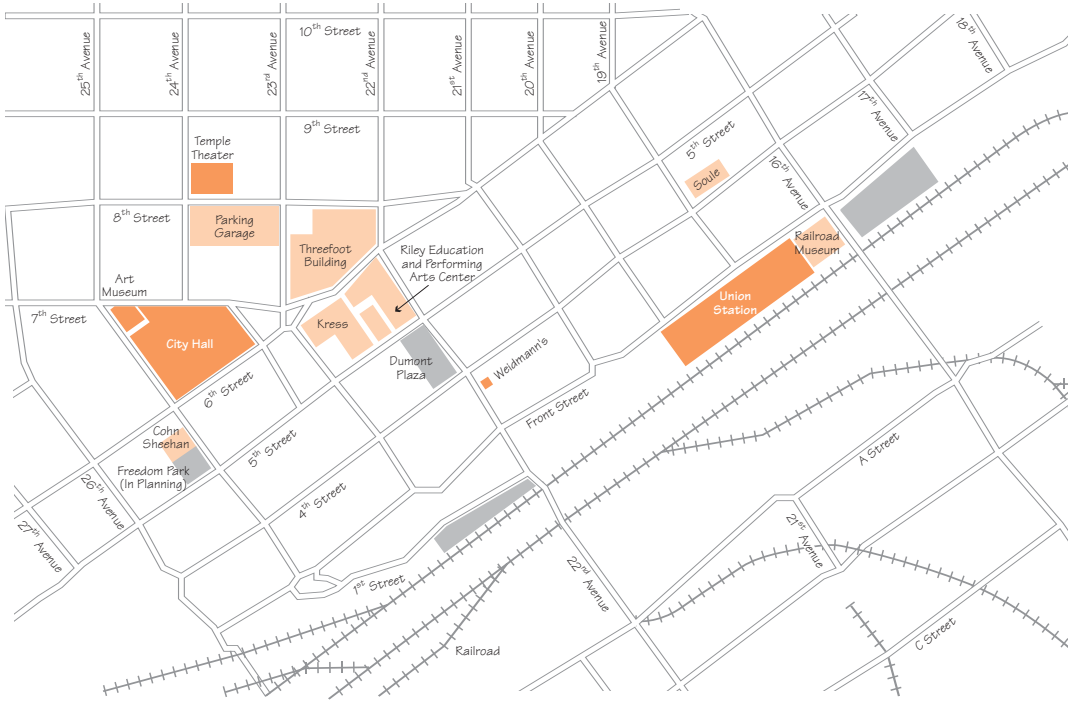
The Riley Center, as well as the entire arts and entertainment district, will require public support. One level of support is security and maintenance, which is needed to keep the area safe and clean. The panel also recommends the creation of a Business and Tourism Welcome Center. The center concept is further explained in other sections of this report, but one of its functions will be to promote performances, conferences, and other events associated with the Riley Center.

Downtown Gateway and Village Fair Mall Site

Meridian's retail trade area includes 11 counties (nine in Mississippi and two in Alabama) and encompasses a population of approximately 310,000. This trade area population generates annual retail expenditures of approximately \$1.2 billion. While not all of the expenditures are spent in Meridian, the city's central location relative to the surrounding region makes it the center for major retailing.

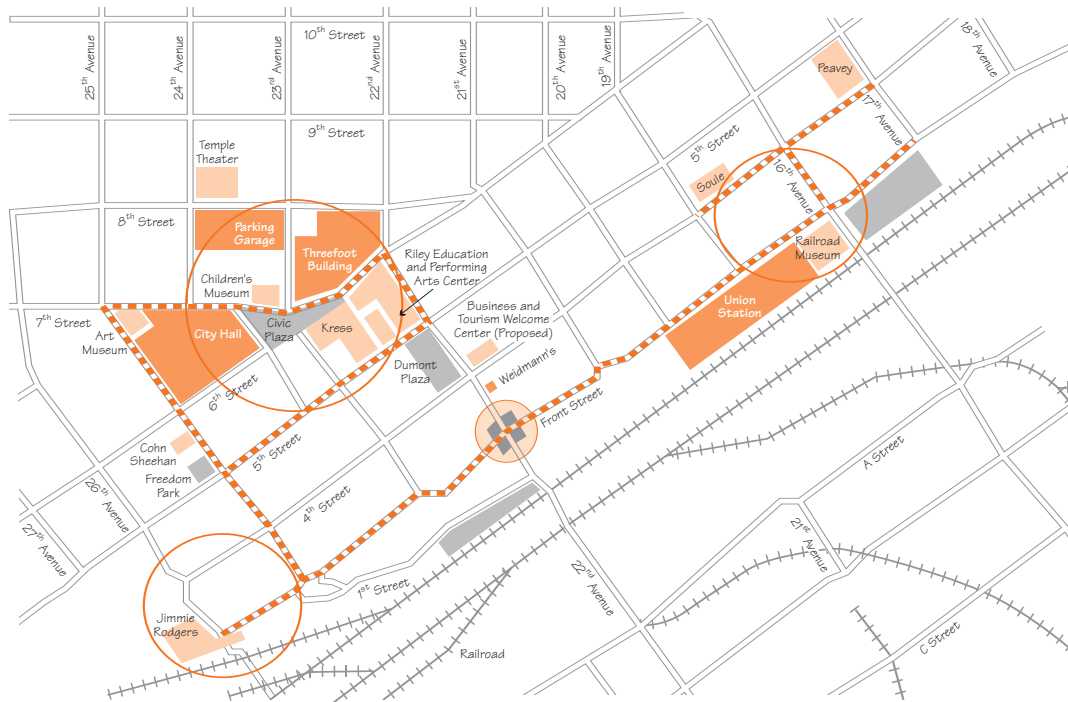
Currently the major retail centers in Meridian are the 730,000 square-foot Bonita Lake Mall and the center that includes Wal-Mart, Sam's Club, and Lowes. The recent performance of these shopping centers south of I-20/59 (Wal-Mart is estimated to be performing in the \$400 per square foot range) suggests that other retail tenants may soon be attracted to this regionally strategic location. The panel recommends further study to evaluate the retail potential in the regional market. Panel members believe that there may be an opportunity to attract tenants such as a Target, an electronics store, or a home improvement center to the vacant Village Fair Mall property.

The physical geography of downtown extends from the city core to I-20/59 along the 22nd Avenue corridor. Many structures, including the old Village Fair Mall, lie vacant. The panel has identified the mall as a crucial entryway to downtown, and recommends that the city encourage its redevelopment. This will create an attractive "gateway" to the downtown area and will encourage



The current layout of downtown Meridian.

- Key:**
- Parks
 - Projects under Construction or in Planning
 - Railroad
 - Downtown Landmarks



The panel's proposed redevelopment strategy.

- Key:**
- City Walk
 - Parks
 - Museums/Cultural Attractions
 - Anchor Areas
 - + Downtown Gateway
 - Downtown Landmarks



The conversion of space above ground-floor retail into residential units is an excellent reuse of vacant downtown buildings—as has been successfully demonstrated at the Front Street Apartments.

traffic on the north side of I-20/59 towards the city center.

Positioning the Anchors

Meridian has a number of key projects currently under development and many in various stages of planning in the downtown area. The top graphic on page 15 depicts the current layout of downtown, which is anchored by the Riley Center and Union Station. It also shows that there are no significant anchors in downtown's southwest area, which has resulted in the neglect of the African American Historic Business District and the western portion of Front Street, although there are a number of furniture and men's clothing stores in the area.

The panel notes that in many metropolitan areas undergoing urban revitalization, a major attractor (or anchor) has facilitated development and encouraged foot traffic. The key for downtown Meridian will be to position the anchors so that foot traffic is maximized throughout the area. The proposed Jimmie Rodgers Museum will attract visitors and will serve as a third anchor for downtown.

The Jimmie Rodgers Museum currently is to be located on the site east of the Railroad Museum, between 17th and 18th avenues, but the panel feels strongly that it should be relocated to the other end of Front Street near 26th Avenue. This strategic repositioning will anchor the opposite side of downtown and redistribute the pattern of foot traffic throughout the area. The bottom graphic on page 15 depicts the recommended relocation of the museum. The reconfiguration will balance the geographic position of anchors, which will serve as catalysts for redevelopment in their respective areas.

The panel strongly recommends that public policy and finances be focused on these three areas. Public investment in badly needed infrastructure (e.g., streets, landscaping, utilities, etc.) will attract businesses. This type of investment will ultimately ripple through the entire downtown. The success of these key areas will serve as catalysts for other infill development that will ultimately link the districts.

Downtown Housing

Attracting singles and families to homes and apartments in the downtown will help the city achieve its most important goals: an increased residential component in the city core; provision of sorely needed support for additional downtown retail shops; and filling some, if not all, of the area's vacant office buildings. The renovation and conversion of the Rosenbaum Building into condominiums and the recent completion of the Front Street Apartments are precedents for future downtown housing. The panel identified three likely markets for such products: young professionals already in Meridian; new, urban-oriented recruits arriving at the hospitals; and the increasing number of empty nesters moving to Mississippi for its low-cost, high quality of life.

Planning and Design

As Meridian embarks on revitalization of its downtown core, the city will need to successfully deal with a number of planning and design issues. They include but are not limited to traffic and transportation, a downtown gateway, streetscape design standards, downtown housing, parks and green space, and infrastructure. The panel's planning and design team examined each issue and made recommendations that should help Meridian facilitate a successful downtown revival. This section highlights the panel's areas of focus and recommended actions, which are intended to produce highly visible results and to create a viable road map for the future.

Traffic and Transportation

Three elements are key to the planning and management of transportation systems, especially as they affect downtown redevelopment: efficiency, safety, and appearance. The panel observed and experienced the traffic and transportation patterns in the study area and provided the following recommendations.

Traffic Flow

The city street system appears to be adequate to accommodate existing and anticipated traffic volume. With the exception of the occasional accident or construction project, traffic congestion is a rare occurrence in Meridian. Traffic signal sequencing has caused some irritation among community members interviewed and should be examined. The one-way system of downtown streets causes some confusion for visitors and new residents, and also encourages rapid movement through and out of the city core.

The panel recommends that traffic circulation be changed from the existing one-way system to the original two-way street pattern in order to slow traffic, enhance ease of circulation, increase retail

accessibility, and upgrade the streetscape image. This change will require realignment of the existing diagonal parking to a parallel configuration. Some loss of street parking will result; but the new municipal parking deck and other off-street parking facilities will absorb this loss.

Sight Lines

Sight lines are the primary consideration in city street safety evaluations. Sight lines are of paramount importance at intersections and diagonal parking zones along one-way streets. The majority of intersections in the study area have adequate sight lines and those that do not are the result of street plantings being either poorly placed or simply overgrown. Diagonal parking poses the greatest threat to motorists in the city because drivers cannot see oncoming traffic as they back out into the street. This danger is exacerbated by the fact that the wide one-way streets encourage drivers to move at a rapid pace. The conversion to two-way circulation and parallel parking will significantly help with this problem.

Street Aesthetics

The aesthetic quality of streetscapes in downtown Meridian affects potential development more so than do either of the two previous issues. Individuals or companies considering relocation to a city are concerned with the appearance of the streets and the image that they convey to a greater extent than they are with the street's capacity to handle traffic. The streetscapes in Meridian are very wide and, in many cases, barren and lacking in aesthetic appeal. Trees planted along streets are of many different species, rendering a lack of unity in the downtown core. However, several areas including the north end of Front Street have excellent plantings. Streetscape design standards are discussed later in this section.

The lack of streetlights and wide sidewalks makes the 22nd Avenue Bridge uninviting to pedestrians. The bridge offers a poor visual introduction to downtown.



Downtown Gateway

How the city of Meridian is perceived by approaching visitors is essential to redevelopment efforts. The first impression, or gateway impression, frequently determines the long-term opinion held by a visitor. The panel recommends the following gateway improvements to enhance the redevelopment potential of the downtown area.

22nd Avenue Bridge into Downtown

The 22nd Avenue Bridge over the railroad tracks is the single most important entry point into the city core. Currently the bridge is uninviting to pedestrians and is a visual blight. The panel believes that cosmetic changes to the bridge will greatly improve the quality of entry into downtown.

The panel recommends that the city mill, resurface, and re-stripe the bridge to improve its aesthetics. The removal and replacement of the current overhead highway lighting with decorative streetlights appropriate to a historic district will soften the visual impact of the bridge. The new decorative light poles should include banners and hanging flower baskets. A sign with the city brand and a welcoming message should be placed at the south end of the bridge, letting visitors know they are entering downtown Meridian.

When replacement of the bridge is considered in the future, the structure should be widened to accommodate pedestrian traffic on both sides, and pavement-level greenery should be added, also on both sides.

The exterior condition of the buildings at the corner of 22nd Avenue and Front Street contributes to an unattractive downtown image.



Intersection of 22nd Avenue and Front Street

The buildings at the north end of the bridge at the intersection of 22nd Avenue and Front Street form key impressions on the visitor. These buildings, including the Meridian Hotel, appear underutilized and should be a high priority for redevelopment. The panel recommends that conversion to residential units above ground floor retail be considered. The redevelopment of this intersection is essential because it provides the first street-level image of downtown.

22nd Avenue from I-20/59 to Downtown

This entire corridor should be considered the entry to the city. Currently, 22nd Avenue looks tired, and is characterized by lower-end strip centers and many vacant buildings. To improve this gateway corridor and soften its rough image, the panel recommends that large-scale street trees be planted along its length. Buildings that are currently vacant and not suitable for redevelopment should be removed and the lots planted until future development occurs.

The creek channel also has been neglected and is not a visual benefit to the city. The panel recommends planting of native vegetation along the creek's banks. The city should consider this a landscape or watershed restoration project, and seek state and federal funding.

I-20/59 Interchange at 22nd Avenue

The panel recommends that a pleasing introduction to the city be created through the use of median and shoulder-area plantings of wildflowers and other attractive, low-maintenance vegetation. These plantings should extend for a considerable distance on either side of the interchange to create an impression of commitment and sustainability. The city brand should figure prominently on highway signage and one or more large public art installations should be included as part of interchange improvements.

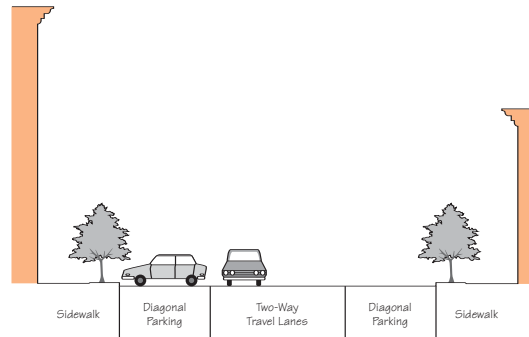
Streetscape Design Standards

The panel believes that the following recommended streetscape design standards are essential to the redevelopment of downtown. If imple-

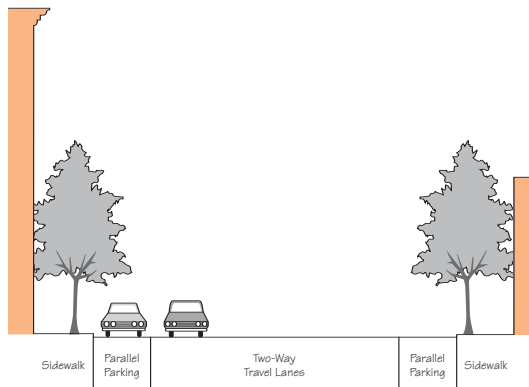
mented they will help to slow traffic, increase pedestrian and vehicular safety, and improve street-level aesthetics of the area.

Parking-Intensive Streets

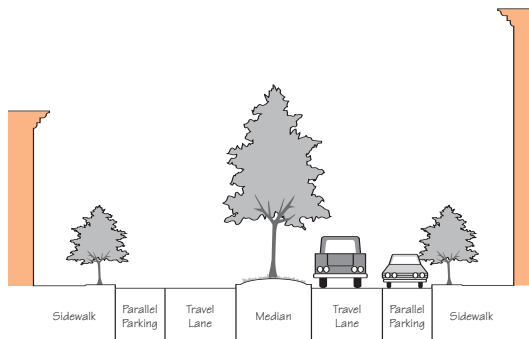
Streets of a parking-intensive nature are streets that are not dedicated to a pedestrian-intensive or retail environment (e.g., 4th Street). These streets should be two-way with one lane in each direction, have small trees and islands at intersections, and diagonal parking on each side. This is similar to the current configuration of many streets in the downtown. See the top graphic below.



Parking-intensive street.



Arterial street.



Retail and pedestrian street.

Arterial Streets

Streets of an arterial nature are streets that are bordered by large office buildings, with vehicles moving through the area, and are not dedicated to a pedestrian or retail environment (e.g., 22nd Avenue). These streets should be two-way, with two lanes in each direction, have street trees along the sides, and parallel parking. See the middle graphic on page 19.

The wider traffic area of arterial streets provides ease of through-travel while the large street trees provide shade and soften edge conditions.

Retail and Pedestrian Streets

Streets of a retail and pedestrian nature are streets that are bordered by small storefronts and are characterized by a residential or cultural environment (e.g., Front Street). These streets should be two-way with one lane in each direction, have a median with large street trees, parallel parking, and small flowering trees at the sidewalk.

The narrow travel area calms traffic and increases pedestrian safety. The median trees provide sound deadening and also increase visual privacy for the second-floor residential units. The small sidewalk trees do not conflict with signage or awnings while they provide visual appeal and shade. See the bottom graphic on page 19.

Downtown Lighting

A uniform system of street lighting needs to be developed for the historic districts of downtown. In the study area, the lighting at the end of Front Street is most representative of appropriate historic lighting. Funding of lighting installations could be shared by property owners and the city.

Streetscape Plan

A streetscape plan must be developed and funded to complement the street design standards. The plan should include the locations and types of vegetation, street furniture, bicycle racks, and other amenities that are preferred in the downtown area.

The panel recommends that the city create a tree-planting type standard that includes native species for downtown. It will be essential to limit the number of planting types in order to create a uniform appearance for the area and to ease mainte-

nance. The standard should contain no more than three types of street trees, three types of smaller flowering or decorative trees, and four types of groundcover. The panel's streetscape plan on page 21 identifies recommended streetscape design standards and placement of trees.

The city also should create decorative seasonal flowerbeds in strategic, high-visibility locations. These beds could be "adopted" by local businesses to defer the cost to the city. They will complement the streetscape design standards mentioned earlier in this section.

Downtown Housing

Full-time residents in the city core are a vital component of successful downtowns. These residents support local restaurants and retail establishments to a greater degree than do their commuting counterparts. They also provide vibrancy in the core after work hours and on the weekends. More inhabitants in a downtown area also encourage a positive perception of safety.

Meridian is fortunate to have a diverse inventory of vacant downtown buildings ideal for residential reuse. The Front Street Apartments and the Rosenbaum Building are excellent examples of this. Most importantly they prove that there is demand for this type of housing downtown. The four buildings at the corner of 22nd Avenue and Front Street are good candidates for residential reuse because of their location at the gateway to downtown.

Historic District

To facilitate the development of downtown housing, the city should combine and expand the Urban Center and Union Station historic districts. They also can be incorporated into the current African American Historic Business District, but must include both sides of Front Street from 19th to 26th avenues to capitalize on the success of the Front Street Apartments. The approximate boundaries of the proposed center city historic district are shown in the panel's downtown districts plan on page 22.

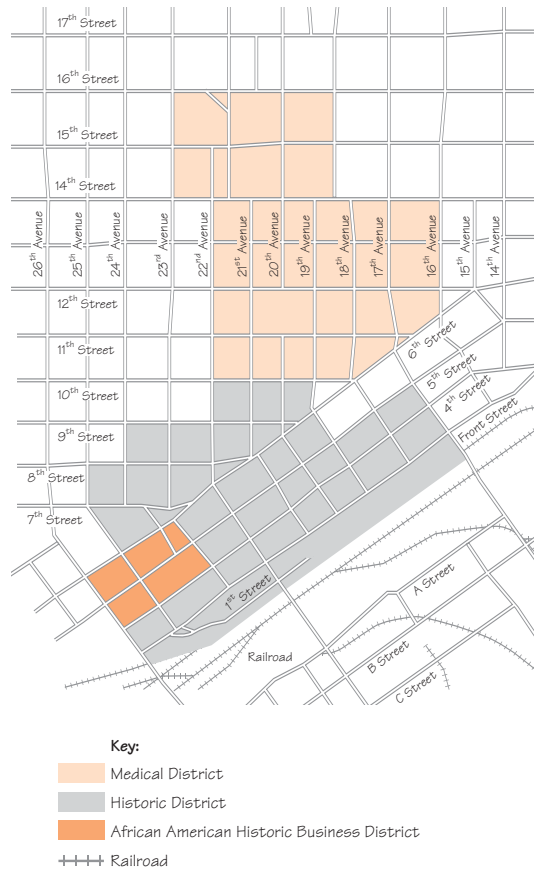
By creating a larger downtown historic district, the city can utilize a number of programs and in-

The panel's streetscape plan.



The successfully renovated Rosenbaum Building is a tremendous asset to downtown Meridian.

The panel's proposed downtown districts plan.



With the construction of City Center Plaza, Meridian's city hall will be visible from 22nd Avenue.



centives to promote the development of downtown housing and urban living, which are discussed later in this report.

Green Space

High-quality green space is an essential element of successful downtown areas. Public green spaces are the living rooms of the city, providing people with a place to partake in many activities, both active and passive. To encourage downtown living, additional green space needs to be defined and created. The panel recommends the following green space initiatives.

Center City Plaza

A major center city plaza is recommended between City Hall, the Riley Center, and the proposed hotel at the Threefoot Building. Green space in front of City Hall should be expanded to provide a view of the building from 22nd Avenue. The plaza should include a water feature and sculpture, along with the Doughboy Monument.

Pedestrian Connection

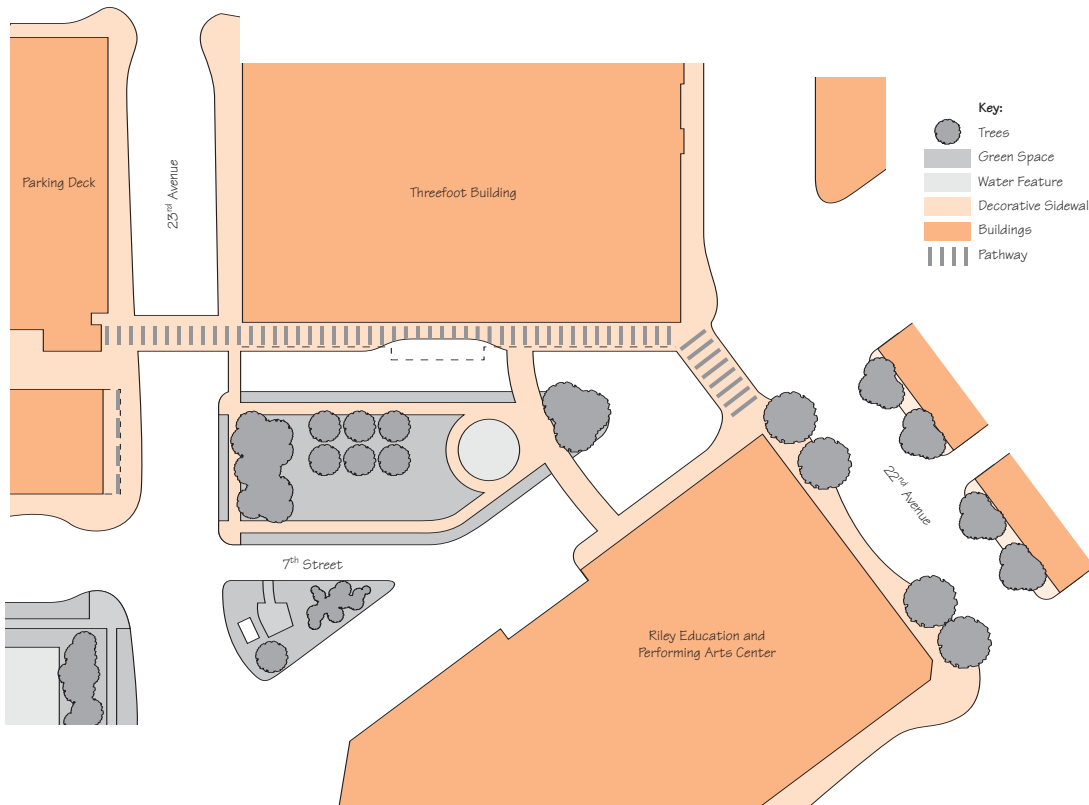
To provide pedestrian connections between the new parking deck, the Threefoot Building, and the Riley Center, panel members recommend the creation of a new pathway. Pedestrians will cross 23rd Avenue from the new parking deck entrance and pass under awnings along the face of the hotel to the intersection of 22nd Avenue and 6th Street. This should provide a safe, convenient, and attractive pedestrian link between the new garage and the three major facilities. This path should be designated by the use of a brick or a decorative concrete sidewalk. The graphic on page 23 depicts the panel's proposed pedestrian connection.

Freedom Park

A park should be located at the corner of 25th Avenue and 5th Street in the African American Historic Business District. The park should include green space with a memorial to leaders and families from the civil rights era. This location also is ideal for public art.

Dumont Plaza

Panel members believe that the use of Dumont Plaza needs to be clarified—either as green space or program space. If it is a green space, the raised



The panel believes that the creation of a pathway from the new parking garage to the Riley Center will provide a safe and convenient pedestrian link.

planters should be eliminated and walkways minimized to provide more lawn area. If it is to be used as a program space, the raised planters in the lower plaza should be removed and the entire area paved with aesthetically pleasing material. This plaza also is an excellent area for murals on building walls.

Private Green Space

Additions to the city's zoning ordinance requiring future developments to include landscaped areas should be considered. Ordinance requirements could include street furniture, street trees, flowerbeds, or small public plazas where appropriate.

Infrastructure

The Achilles heel of many cities is the condition of old infrastructure, including storm drainage, sanitary sewerage, gas and water supply lines, and electrical distribution. Fortunately for downtown Meridian, the city's infrastructure capacity is currently adequate for its population and present

uses. Although issues with stormwater drainage and sanitary sewage exist, they are not detrimental to the overall revitalization of the downtown area. This section describes the various infrastructure issues affecting downtown and the panel's recommended solutions. Funding for infrastructure improvement or repair should be sought from state and federal sources or should be included in the capital budget to address these issues in the long term.

Stormwater Drainage

It appears that Meridian's current stormwater system is near or at capacity. A recent survey of existing stormwater structures within the study area indicates that the conveyance pipes need to be cleaned of obstructions and many areas that have been crushed or collapsed need to be repaired. Once this is done, the system should adequately accommodate stormwater runoff from development projects into the foreseeable future.

However, due to the increased runoff from upstream, many inlets near the intersection of 22nd

The small stormwater inlets around downtown need to be enlarged to allow for quicker drainage.



Avenue and 6th Street need to be enlarged to accommodate the increased flow.

A drainage model that projects the impact of proposed development in the watershed on downstream locations including downtown should be developed. As additional impervious surfaces are created to the west of downtown, the stormwater burden on the area can increase. Stormwater quality also should be considered and federal funding for water quality enhancement should be sought if needed.

Sanitary Sewerage

It appears that Meridian's current sanitary sewerage system has operational capacity to accept the burden placed upon it by redevelopment. The decline in demand on this system over the last several years has resulted in the capacity to accept additional demand. As with the stormwater management system, the sewage infrastructure should be evaluated for adequacy.

Gas Lines

Gas lines and meters throughout the study area are being replaced within the next year as a part of routine management. The result of this effort by local gas companies will be sufficient capacity for future redevelopment projects.

Water and Electric Service

Water and electrical service appears to be adequate to support redevelopment. Many abandoned electrical lines remain above ground in the study area and should be removed by qualified personnel as soon as possible for safety and aesthetic reasons.

A master plan for infrastructure repair and improvement needs to be developed. It should include annual budgeting of money for planned maintenance of infrastructure including, stormwater management, sanitary sewerage, sidewalks, paving, and public spaces. Funding should be allocated based upon a maintenance plan prepared by the public works department.

Additional Plans and Studies

Downtown is the heart of an urban community. A healthy community needs a healthy heart. The redevelopment of Meridian's downtown will require a combination of strategic development plans. This report should be seen as the framework for those plans.

Downtown Strategic Development Plan

This plan should identify potential development opportunities downtown and outline a clear and concise vision for its future. The plan should include major land uses such as residential, commercial, office, government, mixed-uses, public improvements, utilities, and landscaping. The plan should identify areas to be preserved and/or enhanced as well as those to be demolished. This plan should indicate major anchors as well as secondary uses. It should provide guidelines for infill development. The plan should identify streetscape improvements. Finally, the plan should prioritize public and private developments and their phasing.

Medical Area Plan

The city and the three hospitals should develop a coordinated plan for development of the medical areas at the northern edge of downtown. The three community hospitals—Anderson, Rush, and Riley—are excellent institutions that have a major economic impact on the city center. Each is expanding independently without much coordination. These continuing expansions will have seri-

ous impacts on infrastructure as well as on the downtown area and adjacent neighborhoods.

A medical area plan should identify the expansion needs of each of the three institutions. This plan should include land uses, housing needs, parking access, streetscape, and utility needs as well as design guidelines. The plan should provide an answer as to how and where these uses will be located. The plan also should delineate public infrastructure needs related to these developments.

The approximate boundaries of the proposed medical district are shown in the panel's proposed downtown districts plan on page 22. This plan should be adopted by the three hospitals as well as the city.

Landmark and Districts Identification Plan

Numerous important historical buildings in Meridian are known by name to locals. However, visitors are frequently confused because they are unfamiliar with the buildings' names and histories. This plan establishes a design standard for building plaques to include the building name and important dates and facts. It also should establish a design standard for district signage and include plans for installation of signage at key intersections and gateway areas.

Development Strategies

The vibrancy of Meridian, as with most cities across the country, depends on the creative class: a fast growing, highly educated, and well-paid segment of the workforce on whose efforts corporate profits and economic growth increasingly depend. Members of the creative class do a wide variety of work in a wide variety of industries—from technology to entertainment, journalism to finance, high-tech manufacturing to the arts. They are young, independent, and they share a common ethos that values creativity, individuality, difference, and merit.

Most of the members of the creative class don't value the suburban experience of their parents and the accumulation of material goods. Rather, they value cultural experience, quality of life, the arts and mobility, and often choose to live downtown. It is this creative class that Meridian may look to for a portion of its economic growth and a great deal of its cultural vitality.

This section describes a development strategy for the revitalization of downtown Meridian. It includes strategies that utilize Meridian's strengths: strong community involvement, excellent building stock, dedicated leadership, and appreciation for the arts and culture. The panel firmly believes that if these strengths are exploited, downtown will transform into a vibrant area for all of the city's citizens.

Downtown and the Role of Cultural Tourism

Government, medical services, arts, culture, and entertainment are among the major economic generators in downtowns across the country. Smaller cities are increasingly marketing and utilizing their cultural amenities and "hometown" atmosphere as an economic development tool. Mississippi is in an excellent position to capitalize on this trend because of the large number of musicians

and artists in the state, and because of its numerous facilities and support for the arts.

According to the Travel Industry Association of America, heritage travel in the United States increased 10 percent from 1996 (194.4 million trips) to 2002 (212 million trips). In fact, 65 percent of Americans engaged in a cultural, art, heritage, historical activity, or event on a trip of more than 50 miles in the past year. In most cases, it was the combination of museums, historical sites, performing arts venues, and historical architecture that made smaller communities travel destinations.

Meridian is fortunate to have a very active artistic culture with numerous museums that, when completed, will help create a compelling reason for residents to come downtown, for visitors from throughout the region to stay longer when they visit Meridian, and for tourists to detour off the freeway when they are on their way to New Orleans, Atlanta, or Birmingham.

Some of these attractions will be large enough to be anchors—such as the Riley Center and the Jimmie Rodgers Museum—and will be able to stand alone. Other sites, commonly called "inline attractions," will need to be clustered because they are individually too small and specialized to draw enough visitors to succeed.

Museums

Currently, two museums are located downtown: the Meridian Museum of Art, and the Railroad Museum, which would like to expand. The panel strongly supports this, as an expanded railroad museum could potentially be a major attraction in conjunction with Union Station.

The panel recommends the siting of all the other proposed museums within the downtown core as mentioned earlier in the report. This concentration will create numerous synergies by supporting

surrounding shops, restaurants, and clubs, and by creating a larger audience for each museum.

But a downtown location alone is not enough. The siting of each cultural institution needs to be carefully planned so that together they maximize their positive effect on downtown growth, encourage spin-off activity around them, strengthen each district within the downtown, increase demand for downtown living, and make a visit to downtown Meridian a memorable and fun experience that inspires people to come back again and again.

A major challenge for both the private operators as well as the city will be to secure construction funding and subsidies for operation of these museums—since it is unlikely that all of them will be self-sustaining. A major advantage that the city has and can offer is the large number of well-located properties that it owns throughout downtown. A strategy for getting these museums built will be presented later in the report.

The panel feels that two major proposed museums will be strong enough to be anchor attractions:

Jimmie Rodgers Museum. The panel considers this museum the anchor for the southwest end of downtown. It will be a landmark at the end of Front Street, especially if the planned guitar-shaped facade is built there. It should ideally be sited next to the railroad tracks on open space that will need to be acquired by the city from the railroad. Front Street could be renamed for Jimmie Rodgers as a way to amplify the importance of the district and Rodgers' legacy.

Children's Museum. This proposed museum would serve as another anchor for the downtown art and cultural district. The panel supports its location in the vacant Bell South building that already is owned by the city. There is strong potential for initial private funding of this museum. The panel supports the city's efforts to aggressively pursue this opportunity.

Additional Museums and Cultural Centers

Four additional proposed museums, while individually not strong enough to be anchors, would collectively add significant diversity to downtown Meridian's cultural offerings and draw more



visitors to the area. These four proposed museums are:

Cohn Sheehan Design Center. The center is proposed for Meridian's historic first courthouse, and the site of a race riot to end reconstruction in 1870. It would include classrooms and space for educational programs. The center's development, with that of the proposed Freedom Park along the panel's proposed City Walk, would create a strong activity point that would bring long overdue attention and visitors to the African American Historic Business District.

Institute of Southern Jewish Culture. The institute is planned as a regional link in a chain of Jewish cultural and historic sites throughout the South. Its educational mission is complementary to other educational proposals for the Kress and Newberry buildings. The proposed location near what was the Marks Rothenberg Building is appealing for its historic/cultural connection, and it would also be on the City Walk.

The Mississippi Industrial Heritage Museum. This proposed museum at the Soule Steam Feed Works building would be a unique hands-on manufacturing facility located near the Railroad Museum. Visitors would be able to experience the manufacturing process and operation of the steam engines in the museum.

The panel believes that the city should follow recommendations from the Stennis Institute for the redevelopment of the Cohn Sheehan Building.

Peavey Museum. The now closed museum, that for a time was located in an industrial park outside downtown, would complement both the Mississippi Industrial Heritage and the Railroad museum were it to reopen in the underutilized Peavey facility at the east end of 4th Street. The Peavey name is known around the world among musicians because of the company's legendary equipment, and the power of this name would be important to drawing performers and music lovers. The museum's presence would inspire spin-off entertainment venues nearby with a potential to really enliven downtown.

These four museums collectively provide an important display of Meridian's cultural and manufacturing history.

Operational Sustainability

The panel firmly believes that the arts and entertainment district, and the cultural attractions that are planned for downtown, will require an array of supporting activities. Only within this supporting framework can they—and the downtown as a whole—become truly self-sustaining. The panel considers this a two-phase process in which initial developments support each other and in a second phase are built upon to support long-term growth of a vibrant downtown.

Phase One: Immediate Uses

In phase one, the creation of eating and drinking establishments, coffee houses, evening lounges/bars, artist studios, live/work units, galleries and antique stores draws people into the downtown. Their initial presence in combination with the opening of the Riley Center demonstrates that things are happening in Meridian and a greater awareness of activities in the city core takes place. This burgeoning activity in turn attracts more visitors back to the cultural venues themselves, creating a sustainable cycle of demand.

Phase Two: Later Uses

As the downtown core begins to take off, the level of interest expands beyond its cultural amenities. In phase two, the downtown begins to attract new residents and businesses that have long been missing from the core. New residents are attracted to downtown because of the proximity to

work, variety of cultural amenities, vibrancy, and sense of place. Businesses such as law firms, real estate offices, insurance companies, and many others are drawn to the new center of commerce. Both these residents and businesses will be essential to the long-term sustainability of the core. When they are in place, it will be much easier to attract a local grocer and other services and amenities to Meridian's downtown.

Achieving this cycle of mutually sustaining activity over the long run, however, will not happen on its own. It is necessary to pay close attention to the siting, clustering, and anchoring of downtown services and amenities to make sure they maintain a balance and have adequate exposure.

African American Historic Business District

The panel understands the apprehension and reluctance of long-term property owners to invest in the redevelopment of their properties within the African American Historic Business District because of the area's instability and physical blight. However, their investment will be necessary if Meridian is to have a truly successful downtown revitalization. A collaborative effort among the city of Meridian, property owners, and the Meridian Redevelopment Authority could result in a "win-win" for the city as a whole and for the historic business district. The panel recommends a phased approach.

The first phase of redevelopment in the district will be implementation of the streetscape plan for 5th Street from 22nd to 26th avenues. This will physically link the business district with the cultural facilities of the Riley Center. It should include the replacement of sidewalks, installation of decorative lighting, and removal of unused overhead power lines that are present in the area. The panel considers this a necessary expense, and recommends that funding be sought through the Capital Improvements Program (CIP), mentioned later in the report.

The second phase of district redevelopment will be the adoption of the draft downtown strategic development plan prepared by the Stennis Institute, which proposes the rehabilitation of several



Left: Many curbs and sidewalks in the downtown area are in poor condition and in need of repair. Right: Unused overhead power lines should be removed for both aesthetic and safety reasons. Below: Young's Hotel in the African American Historic Business District is an important cultural and historic landmark.



buildings. This proposal includes restoration of the Cohn Sheehan building, the stabilization of the Fielder & Brooks Pharmacy building, and the design and construction of the proposed Freedom Summer memorial. In addition, further marketing and reuse of the Young's Hotel property and other commercial facades along 5th Street should be explored. Redevelopment of these buildings would create an activity core, and anchor this section of downtown.

Historical significance of individual buildings within the district needs to be recognized and adequately displayed. A plaque designating the building's significance should be placed in public view and be included on the maps for City Walk. The historic importance of the buildings can be recognized by the display of papers, memorabilia, and artifacts from the period in storefront windows or in their lobbies. It also is essential that the African American Historic Business District be an integral part of the City Walk because of its role in

A restaurant or retail establishment in the Newell Paper Company building, at the corner of Front Street and 25th Avenue, would help to anchor the southwest corner of downtown.



downtown's history. As awareness of the district grows and perceptions change, the area will begin to see the same prosperity as the rest of downtown.

The completion of these projects, along with public infrastructure improvements, will be important for further investment in the area. Additionally, higher land uses for the previously identified buildings can finally be realized.

Critical Actions

The panel believes that Meriden needs to take the following specific actions to support the emerging arts, culture, and entertainment focus of downtown and to build a strong heart for the community. Without them, the cultural facilities might get built, but they will not be sustainable over the long run. To take downtown Meriden to a sustainable level of economic and cultural development, the panel recommends the following initiatives.

Downtown City Walk

The panel recommends the identification and creation of a downtown "City Walk" to highlight all of the area's attractions and amenities. The City Walk is essentially a walking tour of the downtown, designated by markers on the sidewalk to guide visitors. This is similar to the popular "Freedom Trail" in Boston. Maps should be available at the Business and Tourism Welcome Center, at local hotels, restaurants, and on the city's web page.

The suggested route of the City Walk is along Front Street from 17th Avenue to 26th Avenue past the Railroad Museum, Union Station, and shops on Front Street to the proposed Jimmie Rodgers Museum; then from the corner of 25th Avenue and Front Street to 7th Street through the heart of the African American Historic Business District and Freedom Park to the Meridian Museum of Art. At 7th Street it turns right and goes past Cith Hall and the new Center City Plaza to the proposed Threefoot hotel at 22nd Avenue. From there it turns toward 5th Street and the Riley Center and Dumont Plaza, and then finally back to 25th Avenue. There is an additional spur along 4th Street between 17th and 19th avenues to the proposed Mississippi Industrial Heritage and Peavey museums. The panel's redevelopment strategy on page 15 shows the proposed City Walk.

Urban Revitalization District

Within this district the city should aggressively condemn property that is economically and functionally obsolete. The Meridian Redevelopment Authority should focus its attention on key, well-located buildings that are damaged or not in use. One of the main goals of the agency is to facilitate the delivery of developable property or vacant buildings to developers or businesses that will add to the revitalization of downtown. Otherwise, deteriorated and dilapidated buildings become a cancer that destroys the property values of neighboring buildings and scares away customers.

Downtown Business and Tourism Welcome Center

The panel believes that there is a strong need for a welcome center as a centralized place where businesses considering locating downtown and tourists who are visiting downtown can come to find out what's offered. The welcome center could include such things as a model showing area buildings and attractions, tourist brochures and maps, and an inventory of downtown spaces for potential retailers, businesses, and residents interested in finding out what's available.

The Business and Tourism Welcome Center should be located in a prominent location close to downtown's gateway. The panel recommends that the Downtown Partnership be located within the center, as could other downtown-related organizations such as the Main Street program, the Chamber of Commerce, the Tourism Office, and perhaps even the Meridian Redevelopment Authority. The center can thus become a key resource for those who want to visit, invest in, or live downtown.

The Public Improvement Corporation could be the vehicle for creating the Business and Tourism Welcome Center just as it created Union Station.

One-Stop Approval Process

The panel recommends that Meridian create a one-stop approval process. As part of this process, one city staff person is assigned to a specific project and takes that development through the entire permitting process. This facilitated approach greatly improves the city's response time for approval of permits and provides a consistent city

contact for the developer/builder. The city also should consider appointing the same staff person to handle all downtown projects. This will increase his or her awareness of the development community's needs, and expand the skills of associated zoning and building code officials. One-stop approval is becoming increasingly popular around the country because it is customer-service oriented and effective.

Gather More Information

The panel has found that Meridian needs more information if it is to effectively plan for future downtown growth. As a major infusion of public and private money is about to come into downtown projects, it will be important for the city to understand and ensure that the projects are fiscally sound. Without this information, the city and potential investors will not know the financial risks involved. The following studies or plans should be considered:

- An economic base study on what industries are growing (retail services, government, medical) and declining, and where potential exists;
- A downtown market potential study for retail, office, and residential uses; and
- Feasibility studies for proposed arts and cultural venues that include the number of potential attendees, estimated economic impact, and how operational shortfalls will be covered.

Implementation Strategies

The city of Meridian currently uses an impressive array of financial programs and tools in pursuit of its downtown redevelopment program. It recently has attracted significant federal, state, and local foundation funding to assist with several of its projects. However, as it moves into the next phase of downtown revitalization, it will have to rely upon an even greater variety of financial programs and sources in order to carry the projects to completion.

The panel compliments government leaders and staff in their current role as facilitators and supporters of downtown redevelopment. However, it is critical that the city better use its limited financial resources to leverage increased amounts of private investment. Private investment is what creates economic stability by increasing the tax base, which relies heavily upon the property tax. The panel recognizes the growing reliance upon the sales tax in Meridian, but cautions that economic diversification is extremely important for a balanced and strong economy. To be sustainable, this economy will need to be resistant to economic shifts in the marketplace—a marketplace that often is affected immediately by swings in the retail marketplace.

The city of Meridian needs to examine its fiscal policies to ensure that they reflect a significant return on public investment. Focused use of public capital dollars should emphasize a commitment and priority to leverage private investment. The city is beginning to understand the need for this policy as it pursues funding for the Threefoot hotel project.

Meridian must also continue to address the public's perception of safety. The perception that downtown is not safe is common to most of our nation's cities and cannot be ignored. As an example, retirees with higher disposable incomes must feel comfortable enough to walk to and explore downtown neighborhoods. One approach is expanded

bicycle and foot patrols by local police. Better lighting, a cleaner environment, increased programming, and of course more tourists, visitors, and users of the downtown area are the best remedies.

This section discusses implementation strategies designed to help the city move forward with the many recommendations outlined in the preceding portions of the report.

Financial Strategies and Recommendations

As Meridian undertakes individual redevelopment projects, city leaders and staff should fully analyze the projects' financial implications by conducting market feasibility studies and developing financial plans. While financing is always the most difficult part of any project, the panel has full confidence in Meridian's ability to obtain the necessary funding for completion of the proposed downtown projects. The following programs are suggested as tools and resources that the city can utilize in this endeavor.

Capital Improvements Program

The panel recommends that the city of Meridian create an annual Capital Improvements Program (CIP). This is necessary to specifically address downtown capital budget requirements. The CIP is prepared annually and allocates approved capital expenditures for systematically acquiring, constructing, replacing, upgrading, and rehabilitating the built environment. Typically, funding is allocated by category including water and sewer; parks and recreation; public facilities; transportation; and downtown, among others.

The panel suggests that the city incorporate key infrastructure investments consistent with the proposed downtown strategic plan into the CIP for downtown. These will include street and traffic upgrades, streetscape improvements, public

plazas and open space, storm and sanitary, and public facilities.

Tax Increment Financing

A Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district should be identified for the downtown area. TIF districts obtain revenues for capital improvements from earmarked taxes on new development. A portion of the TIF annual collections should be allocated to the downtown CIP. This will permit a coordinated and planned budget approach to implementing downtown projects.

Tax Abatement

The city can provide property tax abatement to home and property owners who choose to develop or live in the downtown area for a set period of time of between five to ten years. Such programs have successfully been used in cities across the country such as Portland, Oregon, and Shreveport, Louisiana. A tax abatement program will help bring people into the district for the financial benefits and will serve as a catalyst for attracting downtown residents. While the city will not be receiving property taxes, the new residents will provide much-needed critical mass to support downtown establishments and the greater downtown revitalization—which will contribute to the tax base.

Tax Credits

A number of federal tax-credit programs can be used to help finance downtown housing. The city should provide developers and property owners with information about the Federal Historic Tax Credit Program and Low-Income Housing Tax Credits to help facilitate residential development. Developers and property owners can take advantage of up to a 20 percent tax credit if their projects meet the federal guidelines.

Downpayment Assistance

To further encourage development of downtown housing, the city should create a downpayment assistance program for first-time homebuyers. These programs are used in cities around the country to promote new home ownership. Recipients of downpayment assistance should be required to be owner-occupants for at least five years to ensure stability and to add their much-needed presence downtown.



Lauderdale County

The panel sees a need to coordinate Lauderdale County's financial contribution to the city into the downtown strategic plan. The county's planned contribution should be identified annually within the downtown capital budget.

The Threefoot Building towers above downtown Meridian. It is a visible symbol of the city's vibrant past.

Percent for Art Program

Art is a proven economic development tool. The Southern Arts Federation reports that the arts in Mississippi are among the highest job generators in the state. The Mississippi Arts Commission also has reported that 60 percent of the businesses responding to a commission survey indicate that they use the arts in their communities to recruit new employees. America's nonprofit arts industry generates \$134 billion in economic activity every year: \$53.2 billion in spending by arts organizations and an additional \$80.8 billion in spending by arts audiences. The nonprofit arts industry in the United States supports 1.3 million full-time jobs. Governments also reap considerable economic benefits: \$790 million in revenue at the local level, \$1.2 billion at the state level, and \$3.4 billion at the federal level.

The panel recommends that Meridian join over 400 other American cities in enacting a Percent for Art program as an economic development ac-



When completed, the Riley Education and Performing Arts Center will attract visitors from all over the South.

tivity. The program consists of devoting 1 percent of the city’s capital construction budget toward the purchase and installation of public art. A small, council-appointed city commission would administer the program by developing a public arts plan, soliciting artist submissions, reviewing submissions, recommending art for purchase to city council, and working with the purchasing department to secure the selected piece. Commission membership could be drawn from within the expanded arts council described in the implementation section. City funds are typically leveraged through the use of matching grants and private investment.

One of the first and most obvious locations for public art in Meridian includes blank facades on buildings around the study area, for example, in Dumont Plaza or Freedom Park, which would be ideal for mural projects.

Role for Organizations/Partnerships

Revitalizing downtown Meridian is an overwhelming task for even the most experienced and successful developers and public officials. It will require a tremendous amount of coordination and work by numerous stakeholders. The following section defines the roles and responsibilities of each of the key stakeholders.

Meridian Redevelopment Authority

The panel recommends that the Meridian Redevelopment Authority (MRA) be vested with additional authority in the implementation of the downtown redevelopment program. The MRA needs to be able to assemble land and, if necessary, use condemnation. In addition, the MRA should be endowed with a dedicated funding stream from TIF money so that it can execute development deals in cooperation with the city of Meridian.

One example of an expanded role for the MRA is gap financing for projects that have difficulty attracting traditional support. The MRA must also be able to partner with private developers to facilitate development.

Downtown Business Improvement District

The panel recommends the identification and creation of a Business Improvement District (BID) that serves as an umbrella organization for providing enhanced downtown services. A BID is a special overlay assessment district approved by the property owners, who self-impose a tax on their property. The BID has a board of directors and a staff that provide services such as self-promotion, marketing and public relations, as well as supplementing the city’s cleanup and security program. BID activities are funded by the self-imposed tax and administered so that benefits stay within the designated district. The BID would replace a largely inactive merchants association.

Meridian Arts Council

The panel recommends that the city expand the Meridian Arts Council to serve as the formal umbrella arts organization for Meridian. The panel recognizes the increasing importance of the arts to the economy of the community, and strongly feels that increased coordination and interface is necessary to ensure that each art organization’s strengths are maximized. The council can serve as a clearinghouse for performances, shows, events, and festivals, both public and private, in Meridian. It also can help coordinate the marketing and fundraising of events.

The panel recommends that the council formalize a dues-based membership to incorporate all area arts organizations including the visual, perform-

ing, and literary. If the Percent for Art program is established, the city should create an Urban Design and Public Arts Commission to offer an independent voice in guiding public art.

Museums

The siting, programming, and operations of the proposed Children’s Museum, the Institute of Southern Jewish Culture, the Mississippi Industrial Heritage Museum, the Jimmie Rodgers Museum, and potentially the Peavey Museum must be closely coordinated and interfaced with the two existing downtown museums—the Meridian Museum of Art and the Railroad Museum.

The panel recommends that the museums’ management and planning teams meet to discuss their interests as well as the funding sources associated with land and building acquisition, construction, and future operating budgets. Today, many museums require annual dedicated endowment funds to cover budget deficits. Consideration should be given to combining some of the various museums’ administrative and planning functions to lessen the financial burden of operating costs.

A variety of external funding sources such as private investors, state and federal grants, and national foundations independent of current local foundations should be sought for both capital construction and operating endowments. Local foundations and public funds cannot support the financial requirements of all of these museums. The city of Meridian could be looked to for land and/or buildings to house the proposed institutions.

Educational Initiatives

There is strong interest in establishing a magnet school for the arts. The school should be located within the Riley Educational and Performing Arts Center as recommended by the Stennis Institute of MSU. This is a wonderful opportunity to enhance the arts in the community and to strengthen their role as a contributor to the local economy. The magnet school could be located on the upper floors of the Kress Building to afford it an opportunity to expand and complement other programs. These could comprise an educational program for the hospitality arts, including hotel and restaurant management, and food preparation. Foundations,

businesses, and other arts supporters could supplement federal and state education funding.

Communication Strategies

The panel believes that communication between the city government and the general public, non-governmental organizations, Lauderdale County, and the community’s stakeholders must be enhanced. The proposed downtown strategic plan update provides an opportunity to increase participation and input into the many redevelopment initiatives projected for downtown. The panel foresees a need for officials from the city of Meridian and Lauderdale County to meet monthly to coordinate the city’s redevelopment plans and to review required capital financial contributions on joint downtown projects.

Hospitals

Meridian is blessed with three excellent hospitals. Increased communication among the hospitals and the city government on a monthly basis would be extremely beneficial to downtown redevelopment efforts. The hospitals should prepare updated master plans in consultation with the city in order to ensure coordinated planning initiatives that complement each other.

Branding

The panel recommends that Meridian undertake a branding and imaging initiative. This effort is critical to making downtown a successful visitor and tourist destination. A branding consultant should be enlisted to create a unique theme and image for the downtown. An image campaign can be accomplished in conjunction with the Downtown Partnership and the downtown retail business community. The branding initiative could be funded by the public sector, local foundations, and the local business community—which will benefit directly from increased visitor business traffic.

Customer Service Strategies

The panel recommends that the city government work toward enhanced development services to further aid in the redevelopment of downtown. City employees who are in direct contact with developers, building owners, and the general public must recognize that they are in the customer

service business. Customer service training programs are available to assist with reminding city employees that they are employed to serve the citizens of Meridian. Also, city employees dealing with the general public should be made to feel that they are integral to the city's redevelopment efforts. It will be important for them to see the "big picture" of Meridian's future and to feel that they are part of it. This will make it easier for them to genuinely convey enthusiasm about it to the public.

City government must work to improve response times for plan and permit reviews, as well as for addressing problem properties and deteriorating buildings. Developers and builders are extremely sensitive to time delays that impact their profitability.

Additional Financial Tools

The successful redevelopment of Meridian's downtown will require a variety of resources and support, both from the public sector and various private sources. The following list is not meant to be comprehensive, but hopefully will serve as a guide to tools and strategies that complement those already recommended by the panel. This list was compiled from a variety of sources.

Community Development Corporations (CDCs)

A CDC could be established to develop economic programs and provide financial support for the city's redevelopment initiative. It would not duplicate efforts by existing organizations, but would provide wider access to federal redevelopment funding. A CDC is organized as a nonprofit, 501(c)3 corporation, and is governed by a body of vested community stakeholders. The objectives of this CDC should include helping to facilitate redevelopment by partnering with for-profit developers, and accessing and deploying public capital into the project.

Attracting Support of Commercial Lending Institutions

Commercial lending institutions that service the Meridian and Lauderdale County communities should be solicited for support of downtown revitalization. Under the Community Reinvestment Act of 1977, these institutions are obligated to in-

vest in, make loans to, and provide service to the community in which they serve.

Along with traditional banks, initiatives sponsored by FannieMae and FreddieMac are geared to assist with revitalization efforts. These incentives not only directly assist the ultimate capital recipient, but also can provide financial incentives to the financial institutions, which in turn will pass these incentives on to the capital recipient. The collective objective is to provide an incentive for revitalizing the community.

Leverage Federal Public Capital

The city should utilize a tiered approach to leveraging public capital as an incentive to attract private equity and debt to the redevelopment area. Following is a list of several federal resources to be explored.

HOME Investment Partnership Program (HOME)

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development HOME program provides formula grants to states and localities for community activities that build, buy and/or rehabilitate affordable housing for rent or homeownership, or provide direct rental assistance to low-income people.

U.S. Economic Development Administration (EDA)

The Economic Development Administration of the U.S. Department of Commerce manages grant programs for the purpose of creating private sector jobs in economically depressed areas. On average, these grants total \$850,000 per applicant and the grant funds 50 percent of the project. However, the percentage allocated is based on project criteria. This grant is available to cities, counties, states, nonprofit organizations, and universities. Qualifications require that the unemployment rate be 1 percent above the national average or that per-capita income in the area be 80 percent or less than the national average. Grants are available for various projects including water and sewer plants and lines, business incubators, industrial parks, and spec buildings. To qualify, projects must be constructed on publicly owned land and be owned and operated by the applicant. The investment must directly create private sector jobs.

Urban and Community Forestry Assistance Program

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) provides small grants of up to \$10,000 through the Urban and Community Forestry Assistance Program to communities for the purchase of trees to plant along city streets and for greenways and parks. To qualify for this program, a community must pledge to develop a street tree inventory; create a municipal tree ordinance; establish a tree commission, committee, or department; and draw up an urban forestry management plan.

Economic Development Grants for Public Works and Development of Facilities

The Economic Development Administration of the U.S. Department of Commerce provides grants to states, counties, and cities designated as redevelopment areas by the administration. Grants are allocated for public works projects that include trail development and greenway facilities. There is a 30 percent local match required, except in severely distressed areas where federal contributions may reach 80 percent.

National Recreational Trails Program

National Recreation Trails Program grants are available from the Federal Highway Administration to government and nonprofit agencies for the building of a trail or piece of a trail. Grants range from \$5,000 to \$50,000. This is a reimbursement program (sponsor must fund 100 percent of the project up front) and requires a 20 percent local match. Program funds are split such that 30 percent goes towards motorized trails, 30 percent to non-motorized trails, and 40 percent is discretionary for trail construction.

National Fund for Enterprise Development (NFED)

The National Fund for Enterprise Development, a subsidiary of the Corporation for Enterprise Development and a certified community development institution, provides grants and loans to state intermediaries that support small and micro business development. State intermediaries are financial institutions created to attract and leverage new capital at state or regional levels and then invest those combined funds in local enterprise development programs that serve small and

emerging businesses that don't yet qualify for bank financing.

Attract and Leverage Private Equity

The resources previously mentioned should be used in aggregate as an inducement to attract the private equity community to invest capital into the redevelopment area. In addition, tools such as New Markets Tax Credits, Low Income Housing Tax Credits, and Historic Tax Credits act as incentives to mitigate some of the financial risks faced by investors.

Federal New Markets Tax Credit (NMTC) Program

This program was established by the Community Renewal Tax Relief Act of 2000. It allows taxable investors who make equity investments in Community Development Entities (CDEs) to receive tax credits worth more than 30 percent of the amount invested. Administered by the U.S. Department of Treasury's Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI) Fund, the tax credit is intended to spur \$15 billion of business investment in low-income communities through 2007. Tax credits are expected to be allocated annually between 2002 and 2007 through a competitive process. Unallocated investment authority may be carried over year to year until 2014.

Community Development Entities (CDEs) are organizations that have a primary mission to serve low- and moderate-income communities. Examples include: community development banks; community development corporations; small business investment companies focused on low- and moderate-income communities; and SBA-licensed new markets venture capital companies. CDEs may be either nonprofit or for-profit entities, but only those that are for-profit may apply for New Markets Tax Credits.

Eligible CDEs that apply to the Treasury Department's CDFI Fund and are selected for an allocation will be awarded New Market Tax Credits based on objective criteria related to their experience working with disadvantaged businesses and communities. CDEs apply for an allocation of tax credits on a competitive basis. Once awarded the credits, the CDE is authorized to sell its allotted

The buildings on the south side of Front Street are excellent candidates for conversion to residential and retail uses.



amount to private equity investors who can claim 5 percent in federal income tax credit on the investment amount for each of the first three years, and 6 percent credit for each of the next four years it invests in the CDE. This equals over 30 percent over the life of the investment. CDEs will then use the proceeds raised by the sale of the tax credits to provide funds for eligible businesses and economic activities located in low-income communities, including urban and rural areas.

Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC)

This program was created by the Tax Reform Act of 1986 as an alternate method of funding housing for low- and moderate-income households. Until 2000, each state received a tax credit of \$1.25 per person that it could allocate towards funding housing that met program guidelines; this allocation was raised to \$1.75 in 2002, and adjusted for inflation

beginning in 2003. The tax credits are used to leverage private capital into new construction, or acquisition and rehabilitation of affordable housing.

Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentives

The U.S. Department of the Interior and the Department of the Treasury jointly administer the Federal Historic Tax Credit Program. The National Parks Service acts on behalf of the Secretary of the Interior in partnership with the state Historic Preservation Officer. The 20 percent rehabilitation tax credit applies to any project that the secretary designates to be a certified rehabilitation of a certified historic structure. It is not available for properties used exclusively as the owner's private residence.

Conclusion

The role of Meridian's downtown has changed and evolved over the last century, as it has in most American cities. It is time to capitalize on this new role and face the reality that the downtown of yesterday is no longer viable and will not return. However, the rebirth of downtown Meridian, with its new uses and its mix of business, residential, art, and cultural activity is reflected in the redevelopment of downtowns across America.

Meridian has recently embarked on what promises to be a period of significant growth and revitalization. Several major new real estate and construction projects have the potential to change the shape of the city. The Riley Education and Performing Arts Center is destined to be a world class facility drawing artists and performers from around the globe to eastern Mississippi. The renovation and conversion of the Rosenbaum Building into condominiums and the development of the Front

Street Apartments demonstrate that there is interest in living in the downtown core. Meridian must be prepared to take advantage of these incredible assets in order to reach its full potential.

In order to change the shape of the downtown, Meridian must begin to leverage the public dollars that are being invested in the city. It is the role of public investment dollars to create a private development climate. The panel firmly believes that this is beginning to happen downtown. As the projects that are underway become a reality, it will be time for private investment to step forward and move the redevelopment of downtown forward.

While the recommendations set forth by the panel seem vast and overwhelming, the panel is confident that they can be implemented because of the strong leadership and community support in Meridian.

About the Panel

Laurin McCracken

*Panel Chair
Memphis, Tennessee*

Laurin McCracken, AIA FSMPS, is the marketing and strategies officer for Looney Ricks Kiss Architects, headquartered in Memphis, with offices in Princeton, New Jersey, Nashville, and Celebration, Florida. Prior to joining LRK, McCracken was the national accounts director at McClier. Before joining McClier, he was the chief executive officer of the Global Design Alliance, a strategic alliance of architectural, engineering, and specialty consulting firms.

McCracken was previously with HNTB Corporation where he was the director of marketing for architectural services. During the ten years preceding HNTB, he was the director of marketing for RTKL, where he led their national and international marketing efforts. McCracken is a registered architect and a graduate of Rice University and Princeton University.

McCracken was the national president of the Society for Marketing Professional Services. He is the recipient of the organization's prestigious Marketing Achievement Award. McCracken has been a member of the National Association of Corporate Real Estate Executives (NACORE) for more than twenty years. He is a charter member of NACORE and holds the designation of MCR, master of corporate real estate service.

McCracken is also the chair of ULI's International Council and a 20-year member of the International Development Research Council.

Mark Albrecht

Akron, Ohio

Mark Albrecht serves as the special projects manager for the city of Akron's department of planning. In that role, Albrecht manages special development

projects such as the Middlebury MarketPlace, a 67,000-square-foot new retail center on a former brownfield site. Previously, as economic development manager for the city, his responsibilities and projects included downtown planning and redevelopment, business and industrial development, brownfields, and state and federal project coordination.

Albrecht previously served as a ULI panelist in 2000 for Trenton, New Jersey, advising on downtown redevelopment strategies. Internationally, Albrecht serves as the liaison to Chemnitz, Germany, Akron's sister city. He has served as a state department volunteer under the International City/County Management Association Resource Cities program to develop an economic development strategy for Subotica, Serbia.

Albrecht is a member of the Ohio Revitalization Task Force and the National Brownfield Advisory Board. He has taught for over ten years as an adjunct professor at the University of Akron in urban planning and economic development. Albrecht is a graduate of Bowling Green State University, with a master's in planning from the University of Akron.

Kenneth T. Bacchus

Kansas City, Missouri

Bacchus is president and CEO for the Housing and Economic Development Financial Corporation (HEDFC) in Kansas City, Missouri. HEDFC is a private nonprofit, community-based development organization whose primary purpose is to provide financing for projects benefiting low- and moderate-income families. HEDFC is the sponsoring organization for a number of public-private ventures involving local developers, the homebuilders association, the banking community and the local partnership office of the Federal National Mortgage Association.

Current projects Bacchus has initiated include predevelopment activities for the Beacon Hill Redevelopment Project, an inner-city redevelopment project based on a traditional neighborhood design (TND), and the Vineyard and 39th Street Redevelopment and Concept Plan. Bacchus, an urban planner by profession, has over 26 years of experience in a broad range of redevelopment planning initiatives and management of economic development projects.

Bacchus served two terms as an at-large member of the Kansas City, Missouri city council (1991-99). Bacchus was executive director of a community development corporation (CDC) in the mid 1980's. While on the city council, Bacchus was chairman of the Plans, Zoning, and Economic Development Committee for both terms. In addition to zoning and strategic planning efforts, Bacchus negotiated many of the financing and development packages for new job development, business retention and expansion, and community economic development policies throughout Kansas City, including recently completed projects in the Country Club Plaza and the historic 18th & Vine Jazz District.

Bacchus served as chairman of the Community Economic Development Committee of the National League of Cities and as a member of its board of directors. Bacchus served for 15 years as a commissioner for the Redevelopment Authority and the Tax Increment Financing Commission of Kansas City. He is a member of the Urban Land Institute, where he serves as an adviser to the Affordable Housing Council. He is a charter member of the American Planning Association.

Michael Beyard

Washington, D.C.

Michael Beyard is an urban planner and economist with more than 20 years of experience in the related fields of real estate development, land use planning, and economic development. His experience is focused in both the United States and Europe on commercial and retail development, shopping centers, e-commerce, location-based entertainment, and downtown revitalization.

At the Urban Land Institute, Beyard is senior resident fellow for retail and entertainment development. He is the author/project director of numerous books including *Developing Urban Entertainment Centers*, *Shopping Center Development Handbook*, the *Dollars & Cents of Shopping Centers* series, *Value by Design*, *Developing Power Centers*, *Downtown Development Handbook*, *The Retailing Revolution*, *Ten Principles for Reinventing Suburban Strips*, and *Business and Industrial Park Development Handbook*. He created and directs ULI's annual International Conference on Urban Entertainment Development and its technology and retail real estate forum.

Prior to his current position, Beyard was vice president of strategic development and responsible for the Institute's research, data collection, books, and conferences in the commercial development field as well as for its new strategic initiatives. He created ULI's program in the retail entertainment field including international conferences, books, *Urban Land* magazine supplements, and strategic partnerships with other organizations. In addition, he is the past director of ULI's advisory work in Central Europe under the auspices of the United States Agency for International Development, and the coordinator of program activities for ULI Europe.

Beyard has been honored with membership in Lambda Alpha, the International Land Economics Honorary Society, and was an appointed member of the mayor's Interactive Downtown Task Force in Washington, D.C. He holds a BA in international economics with honors from Rutgers College and a master's degree in urban planning and development from Cornell University where he was elected to Phi Kappa Phi.

Satyendra S. Huja

Charlottesville, Virginia

Satyendra Singh Huja has been director of strategic planning for the city of Charlottesville since 1998. Prior to that he was director of planning and community development for the city of Charlottesville for 25 years. He also has been a consultant to the city of Pleven, Bulgaria on economic development and tourism marketing.

Huja's experiences are in the area of downtown revitalization, housing, historic preservation, transportation planning, art and culture activities, and neighborhood revitalization. He has received honors from the Virginia Society of the American Institute of Architects and recognition from the Pew Foundation for his downtown revitalization efforts.

Huja is an adjunct faculty member at the University of Virginia School of Architecture and teaches urban planning courses on a regular basis. He is a member of the American Planning Association and the American Institute of Certified Planners. He received his master's degree in urban planning from Michigan State University.

Mark McConnell

Roanoke, Virginia

Mark C. McConnell, AIA, is managing principal of Mark McConnell + Associates, an architecture and planning firm based in Roanoke, Virginia. The practice specializes in historic preservation and adaptive reuse for a variety of project types including multifamily housing, hospitality, visual and performing arts facilities, and commercial buildings.

Working in the field since he was 16 years old, McConnell is clearly dedicated to the profession of architecture. As an advocate for sustainable design for the past decade, his major efforts involve educating public and private entities and clients concerning the appropriate application of sustainable planning and design techniques. He is especially skilled in orchestrating projects wherein nonprofit organizations recycle older structures within sustainable parameters.

An American born in Paris, France, McConnell received a bachelor of science in architecture from The University of Virginia and a master of architecture from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. His understanding of the successful integration of tax-credit financing, urban geography,

preservation, and sustainable design has resulted in demand for McConnell as a guest lecturer at collegiate institutions and professional conferences. A community activist and recipient of the Distinguished Service Award from the United Way, McConnell serves on a number of public service organizations' boards and is chair of the Roanoke Arts Commission.

Nathan Moeder

San Diego, California

Nathan Moeder's real estate research experience includes investment and development. On the investment side, projects have included apartments, retail centers, office, industrial, and mixed-use projects. On the development side, Moeder's experience includes large-scale residential developments, office buildings, industrial properties, and hotels. Clients include major corporations, financial institutions, small businesses, individual developers, investors and public agencies.

Moeder has participated in projects with the London Group Realty Advisors, Inc. including financial feasibility and economic market analyses for acquisition and disposition as well as research for litigation consulting. He also has engaged in socioeconomic forecasts for San Diego County to support the traffic and revenue forecasts for the development of the SR-125 toll highway project in the southern part of the county.

Moeder holds a BA in economics with a concentration in mathematical theory and forecasting from the University of San Diego. He is an instructor at the University of California, San Diego Extension for investment and development feasibility, real estate economics and urban development financing. Moeder also instructs at the Newschool of Architecture on management and finance.