

# Meridian Idaho

A ULI Advisory Services Panel Report

August 8–11, 2022



**COVER:** Pathway along an irrigation canal in Meridian. (ULI)

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# Meridian Idaho

Meridian Pathway System Purpose, Equity, and User Experience

A ULI Advisory Services Panel Report

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# About the Urban Land Institute

**THE URBAN LAND INSTITUTE** is a global, member-driven organization comprising more than 45,000 real estate and urban development professionals dedicated to advancing the Institute's mission of shaping the future of the built environment for transformative impact in communities worldwide.

ULI's interdisciplinary membership represents all aspects of the industry, including developers, property owners, investors, architects, urban planners, public officials, real estate brokers, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, financiers, and academics. Established in 1936, the Institute has a presence in the Americas, Europe, and Asia Pacific regions, with members in 80 countries.

The extraordinary impact that ULI makes on land use decision-making is based on its members sharing expertise on a variety of factors affecting the built environment, including urbanization, demographic and population changes, new economic drivers, technology advancements, and environmental concerns.

Peer-to-peer learning is achieved through the knowledge shared by members at thousands of convenings each year that reinforce ULI's position as a global authority on land use and real estate. In 2022 alone, more than 2,800 events were held in cities around the world.

Drawing on the work of its members, the Institute recognizes and shares best practices in urban design and development for the benefit of communities around the globe.

More information is available at [uli.org](https://uli.org). Follow ULI on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram.

# About ULI Advisory Services

**THE GOAL OF THE ULI 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 700 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, brownfield 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 are screened to ensure their objectivity. ULI's interdisciplinary panel teams provide a holistic look at development problems. A respected ULI member who has previous panel experience chairs each panel.

The agenda for a three-and-a-half-day Advisory Services panel (ASP) is tailored to meet a sponsor's needs. ULI members are briefed by the sponsor, engage with stakeholders through in-depth interviews, deliberate on their recommendations, and make a final presentation of those recommendations. A report is prepared as a final deliverable.

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, participants in ULI's ASP 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, academics, representatives of financial institutions, and others. In fulfillment of the mission of the Urban Land Institute, this report is intended to provide objective advice that will promote the responsible use of land to enhance the environment.

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## Acknowledgments

ULI's Advisory Services program would like to thank the city of Meridian team— Steve Siddoway, Mike Barton, Kim Warren, and Rachel Myers—for providing the panel with thorough briefing materials and their hospitality. ULI would also like to thank the more than 30 stakeholders and members of ULI Idaho who shared their experiences, perspectives, and insights with the panel. ULI is grateful for the support of The JPB Foundation.



**PARKS & RECREATION**

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# Executive Summary

**MERIDIAN, IDAHO**, is experiencing unprecedented population growth. Today, the city has four times the number of residents it did in 2000. The population boom resulted in rapid development, including the expansion of multi-use pathways throughout the city. These pathways became an especially valued resource during the pandemic. In fact, in 2021 Meridian residents identified better connection between walking paths as a number-one priority in a city of Meridian community-based survey. Despite the popularity of pathways, inequitable access to the pathway system is a challenge. Many older, previously developed neighborhoods are disconnected from the pathway system. Meridian is also bisected by Interstate 84, making connection between the north and south halves of the city a challenge and a safety concern for pathway users.

ULI was invited by the city of Meridian to explore the pathways throughout the rapidly growing city and examine strategies to bridge gaps in the existing network. Recommendations for implementing an equitable, sustainable, and accessible pathway system were a central focus of the panel.

## Key Recommendations

The panel made the following key recommendations:

### Purpose and Storytelling

- Focus on the purpose and equity of the pathway system to drive future planning and implementation efforts.

- Identify and refine the hierarchy of uses for the pathway system. Not all sections of the system need to serve every use.
- Celebrate successes to date on a regular basis, including communicating continuous improvement and telling the story of the pathway system.

### Equity

- Define equitable access, and identify underserved neighborhoods and populations.

- Although the goal should be equitable access throughout the system, focus initially on equitable access efforts for sections of the path that are close to underserved populations.
- Apply equitable principles directly to planning efforts for the pathway system.

### User Experience

- Complete a Pathways Master Plan update and implementation strategy that further refines the system plan and prioritizes connecting key destinations, highlighting connection points and adding breakways and hubways as places to rest or connect to other parts of the system.
- Maximize placemaking at destinations and interim places along the path, focusing on the needs of the users of that segment of path.
- Enhance the pathways with amenities (art, memory pieces, fencing, information signage, etc.) and engagement, and implement clear wayfinding and identification.
- Combine safety with memorable pathway elements, when possible.

- Add clarity and transparency to pathway maintenance, both in terms of scheduling for user awareness and delineation of responsible parties.

### Implementation and Coordination

- Use Temporary Routing Alternative Connections (TRACs) to bridge gaps in the current system, particularly in places where a permanent pathway has yet to be constructed. Maximize existing infrastructure using all bicycle and pedestrian routes to make connections.
- Develop and coordinate a neighborhood empowerment process.
- Coordinate with partner agencies and adjacent jurisdictions.
- Leverage resources to reach goals, including local vision and commitment, funding opportunities, and people.



## Background and Panel Assignment

**FIFTEEN MILES WEST OF IDAHO'S CAPITAL**, Meridian is a suburban community with agricultural community origins. Its proximity to Boise means that Meridian is often viewed as a suburb of Idaho's capital, but the value placed on its pathway system and parks leaves much to celebrate and has become an asset of the community.

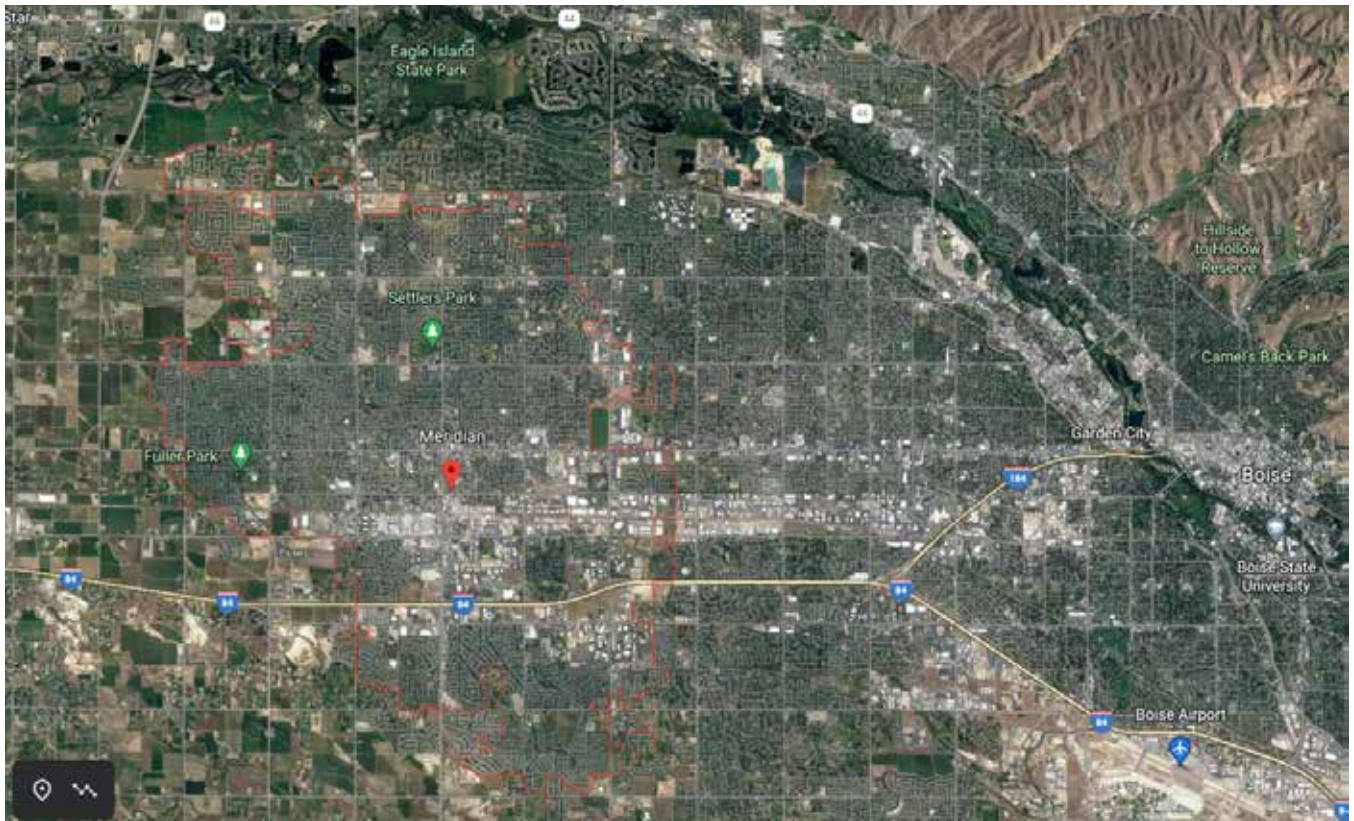
The city is not densely populated. It includes a vast geographic area—35 square miles, with more than 50 miles of existing pathways. The center of the city has seen growth with several mixed-use development projects already underway. As a result of this growth, infrastructure, schools, and parkland have struggled to keep pace, even with robust impact fee assessments in place.

The pandemic took many opportunities, hobbies, and everyday activities from civilians. Nevertheless, one activity in Meridian seemed to thrive during this disruptive period: walking on pathways. When polled on their top priority in a Parks and Recreation Department survey, the item of number-one importance for Meridian residents was the opportunity to improve on better connections between walking paths.

However, Interstate 84 divides Meridian in half, with three state highways passing through the edges of the city. These circumstances pose challenges and produce gaps in the system. The presence of so many highways has posed both safety

concerns and challenges for pedestrians and residents. In addition, Meridian's older neighborhoods are not as connected with the pathway system largely because they were developed before the Pathways Master Plan was in place.

As Idaho's second-largest city, experiencing substantial population growth since the 1990s, Meridian has seen demand for pathways also increase. Meridian uses several tools to add to the pathway system, including developer dedication of property, creation of easements, shared use agreements with the city's extensive canal and drainage system, and individual property owner easements and dedications. The high value of the pathway system is visible to developers, who are inclined to support pathways as neighborhood amenities. Residents who are not near pathways or are not connected to the networks often inquire about how they can increase their involvement in the development of a pathway segment adjacent to their properties to serve their neighborhood.



Meridian is directly west of Boise, the capital of Idaho.

Housing affordability is also a major issue in Meridian, and inflated housing prices have affected costs for pathway development. At the same time, the price of easements needed to complete sections of pathway has increased as land value has increased throughout the community. Homeowners are also less likely to donate easements as overall property value has gone up.

## Demographics

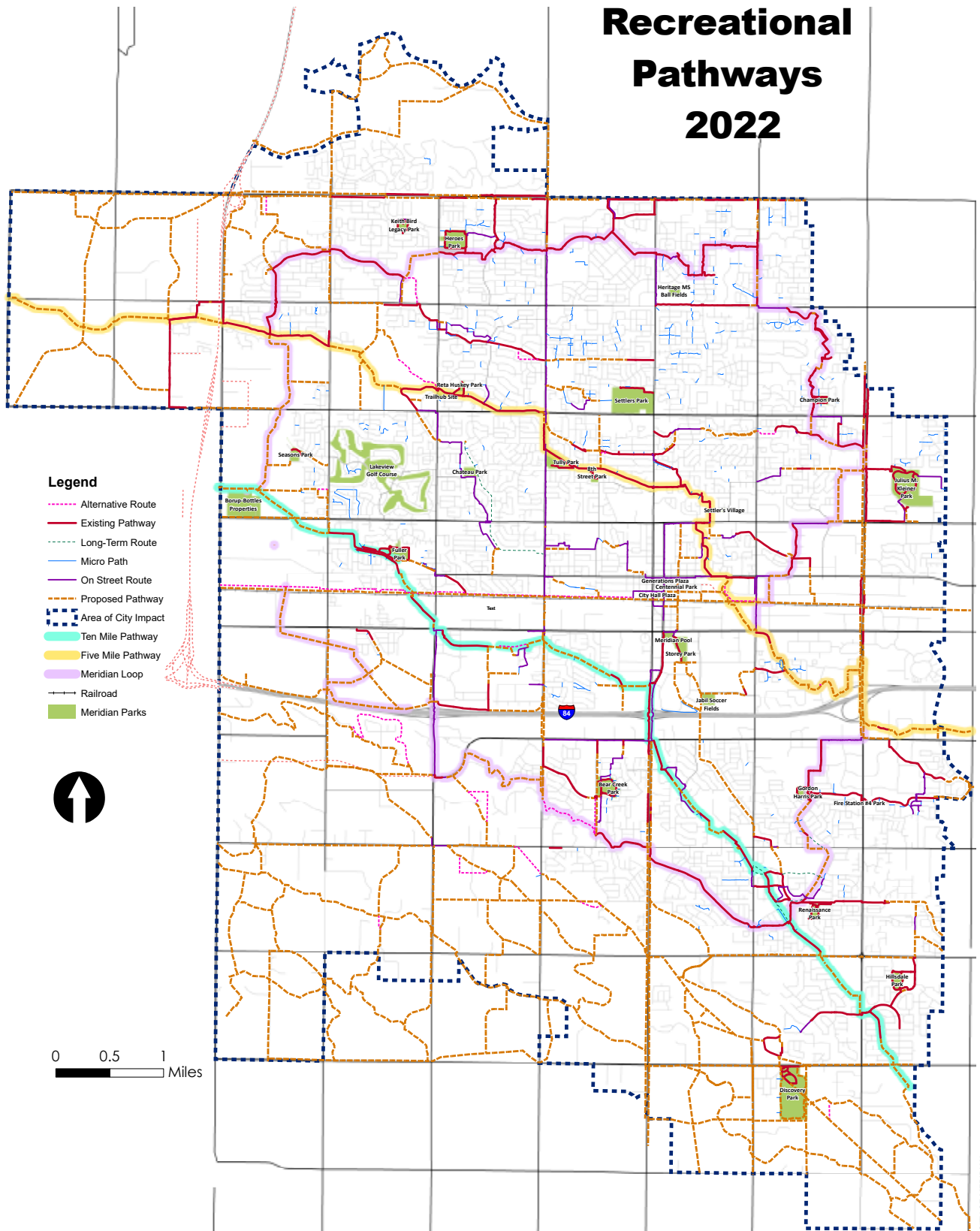
Meridian's estimated population in 2021 was 125,963, and it is still rapidly growing. Based on information provided by the sponsor, Meridian is now the second-largest city in Idaho. U.S. census five-year estimates indicate that in 2021, the median household income was \$85,201, and 6.8 percent of the population lives in poverty. U.S. Census Bureau 2021 five-year estimates indicate that the majority, 87.2 percent, of the population is white, 6.5 percent identifies as two or more races, 2.3 percent is Asian, and 1.3 percent is Black or African American. Almost 9 percent of the population is Hispanic or Latino. Over one-quarter, 27.7 percent, of the population is under 18 years of age, and 12.6 percent of the population is 65 years or older.

## Study Area Context

In the early 2010s, Meridian's pathway system was commonly referred to as the "spaghetti plan." These short, disconnected segments disseminated across the community motivated the city to focus on fewer, more functional connections. Since 2012, the city has conditioned or constructed miles of pathway to connect these formerly disconnected pieces.

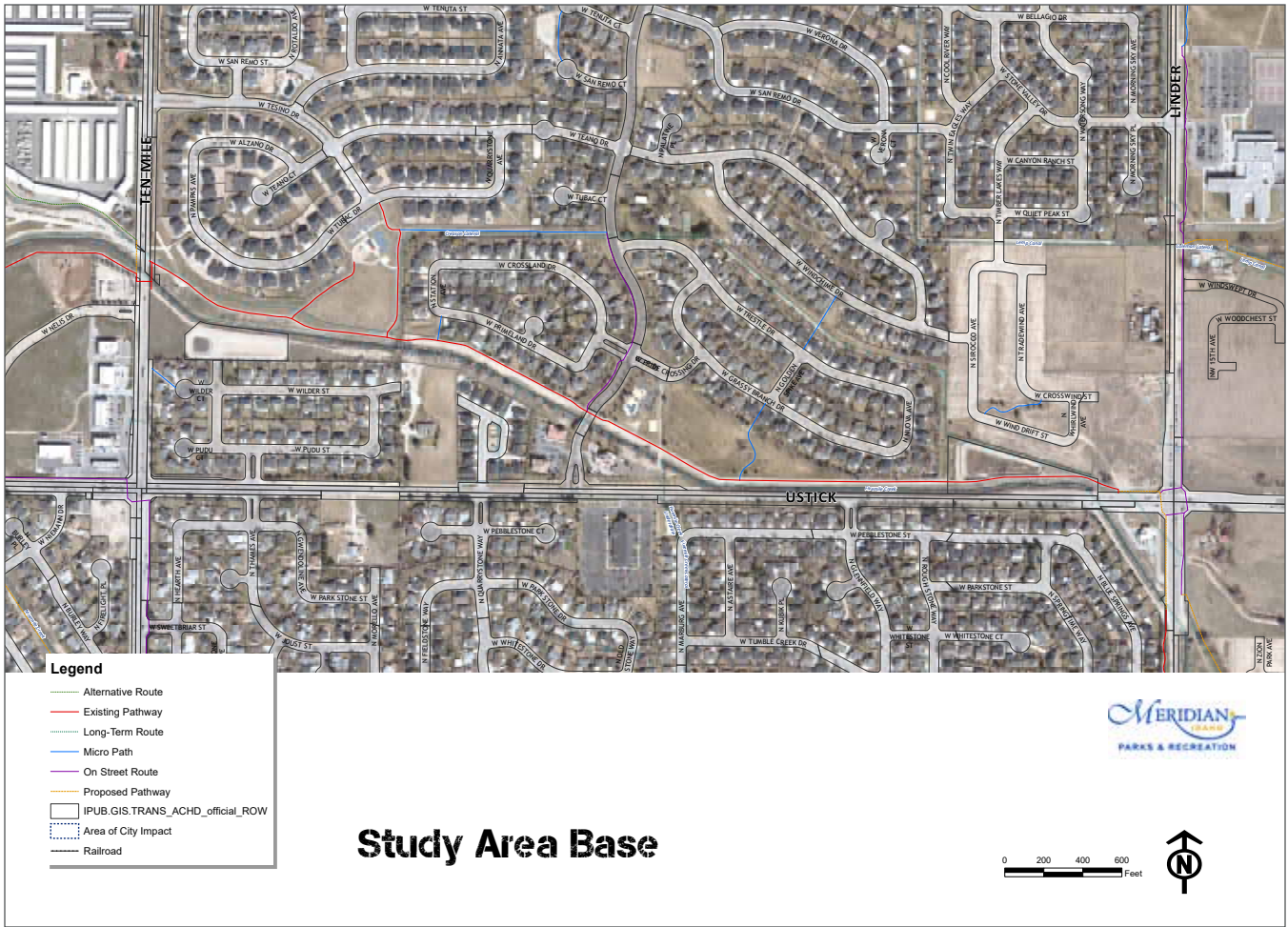
The formal participation of parks and pathways in the Development Review process has been key to this increase in mileage by allowing staff to require pathways as a condition of approval. As the system has become more functionally connected, developers in turn tend to be more enthusiastic about providing pathways, sometimes even when pathways are not required for project approval. Meridian has also used city resources to focus on making the Five Mile Creek Pathway the backbone of east-west pedestrian connectivity. The pathway runs parallel to Five Mile Creek throughout the entire length of one of the study areas identified for the panel.

# Recreational Pathways 2022



CITY OF MERIDIAN

The Meridian Pathways Master Plan includes notable expansion of the existing pathway system throughout the city.

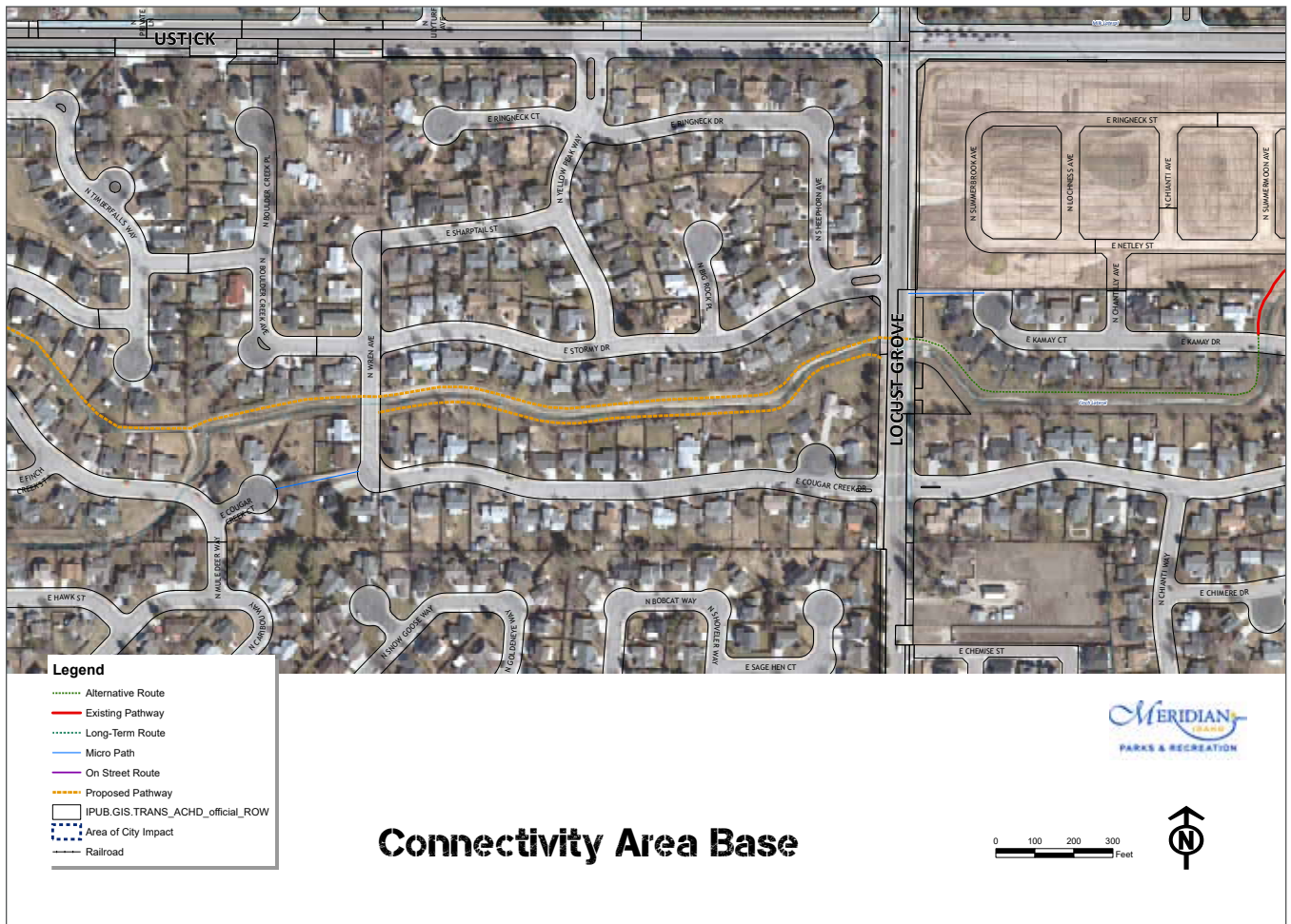


Study Area One, which includes the recently completed Trailhub, illustrates the pathway as an amenity.

## Study Area One

Starting at the city's Five Mile Creek Pathway Trailhub site, situated between Ten Mile Road and Linder Road, this study area is one mile of the Five Mile pathway. The Trailhub, the first facility of its kind in Meridian, was constructed in partnership with Ada County Highway District (ACHD), which offered the Trailhub site for development.

The Ustick Road Corridor is bordered by Five Mile Creek and its associated eastern half mile of pathway within the study area. A Nampa and Meridian Irrigation District easement falls on both sides of Five Mile Creek and covers a portion of the Trailhub location. The square-mile study area is predominantly a single-family residential neighborhood with light office, general retail, and service commercial at major intersections along the arterial roadways.



Study Area Two illustrates an area where two existing pathways are currently unconnected.

## Study Area Two

The second study area focuses on connectivity and is one and a half miles east of the first study area. The sponsor identified this study area as an example of a place with connectivity challenges typical of older parts of Meridian because of the need to purchase multiple consecutive easements on existing residential properties, where ownership extends to the middle of irrigation canals, to complete pathway segments. If a desired pathway easement lies

across a common lot, Meridian city has had success in procuring those easements from neighborhoods. If an entire neighborhood can benefit from the amenity, a homeowners association (HOA) may be interested in granting that single easement, especially if it extends to common areas and is not on a homeowner's property. However, when projects require multiple easements from different owners, procuring all the needed easements has proven difficult.

## AGENCIES AFFECTING PATHWAYS

Many segments in the current pathway system are owned by the city of Meridian. However, even in these cases, other local and regional Idaho agencies can influence pathway projects, including the following:

- ACHD—Ada County Highway District
- NMID—Nampa and Meridian Irrigation District
- Settlers Irrigation District
- Boise Project Board of Control Irrigation District
- ITD—Idaho Transportation Department
- Bureau of Reclamation
- FEMA—Federal Emergency Management Agency; floodplain requirements for Five Mile Creek

## Existing Agreement with the Nampa and Meridian Irrigation District

Historically critical for water delivery to agricultural uses, the network of irrigation canals and laterals of the Nampa and Meridian Irrigation District (NMID) continues to be essential in providing surface irrigation water throughout Meridian today. Drains, or modified creeks engineered to return any excess irrigation water to the Boise River, have fewer constraints than water delivery features and are most suitable for pathway development. Because they angle across development, often in more of an “as the crow flies” alignment, drains, canals, and laterals provide welcome off-street alternatives for pedestrians and cyclists. Therefore, an agreement with NMID was entered into to allow development of pathways parallel to irrigation facilities. With two agencies, and two respective missions—one to provide a public recreation amenity and another to provide an often-scarce water resource—maximizing both has presented challenges, particularly as the breadth and scope of the pathway system and its purpose have expanded over time.

## Panel Assignment

The city of Meridian asked ULI to convene an Advisory Services panel to focus on the city’s efforts to create a more complete, accessible, and valuable asset for the community. Specifically, the sponsor identified the following questions for the panel to address:

### Equitability and Access

- What are strategies for Meridian to increase equitable access to the existing trail system, and how can connectivity across “missing teeth” and major gaps be improved?
- How can the city address and surmount existing barriers to connectivity such as the interstate corridor, major roadways, and canals/waterways?

- How can the city carve pedestrian access through older (often less affluent) areas that were developed prior to implementation of the Pathways Master Plan?

### Brand Identity and Visibility

- What are strategies to enhance awareness of the pathway system, increase visibility, and create a pathway brand?
- How can wayfinding be improved for new and existing pathway users and for users of all ages, abilities, and technological orientations (those who are uncomfortable with technology, or simply want to unplug)?
- How can Meridian promote more activation and activity along the pathway system?

### Partnerships and Implementation

- What are potential funding models to reliably fund pathway easements and construction projects for the pathway system?
- What are strategies for obtaining easements without eminent domain, and how can the easement purchase process be improved and standardized?
- How can the city employ innovative/emerging strategies for working with multiple property owners along canals to foster community collaboration toward connectivity?
- Recommendations for types of consultants that specialize in easement acquisition.

The remainder of this report describes the strategic recommendations prepared by the panel to address these questions and provide an independent perspective on Meridian’s pathway system.



## Purpose and Telling a Story

**A BRAND IS A VISUAL OR SHORT TEXTUAL REFERENCE** to purpose and story. To refine and determine the brand and marketing approach for the Meridian pathway system, the city must first articulate its purpose and begin to tell its story. While specific recommendations concerning identity and visibility for the pathways are discussed in other sections of this report, the panel believes the discussion of the pathway system in Meridian should begin by focusing on purpose.

Why does Meridian have a pathway system? In some communities, pathway systems exist to provide residents with access to amenities that improve quality of life and can lead to a more enjoyable and valuable community. The panel believes that it is important for the city to be clear about the purpose of the pathway system and recommends that it take time to identify and refine this purpose.

### Hierarchy of Uses

The panel believes that use is an important part of purpose. Based on the briefing provided by the sponsor and the site tour, the panel observed that the pathway system serves many uses for the Meridian community. However, not every path has to serve every use. Some paths are wider, others more scenic; some serve

local destinations whereas others can connect to regional trail systems. To further refine the purpose of the pathway system, the panel recommends that the sponsor identify a hierarchy of uses. This hierarchy will help provide organization and direction for storytelling efforts such as branding and marketing, as well as wayfinding and signage approaches.

In its observations during the panel week, the panel saw the following hierarchy of uses:

- **Level 1—Major destination commuting routes:** faster bike traffic encouraged at certain times of day; color-coded markers identify commuting routes and important destinations such as Ten Mile, Five Mile, Meridian Loop, and path to the Boise River Greenbelt;

- **Level 2—Grid of neighborhood destination routes:** slower bikes and scooters allowed; different icons for routes to popular destinations or supporting popular uses, particularly local parks, “third places” (place of worship or community center where the community gathers), and schools;
- **Level 3—Recreation:** walking and jogging, dog walking, play, path parties for neighborhoods, jogging clubs from schools, birding, nature walks, community parades;
- **Level 4—Platform:** art installations, school art, trauma art, historic information and interpretations, and structures that relate to community such as iconic designs for midblock crossings, monuments that are backgrounds for Instagram, using iNaturalist or similar networks to share observations of the pathway environment, playgrounds, dog parks, and sensory gardens.

The panel acknowledges that some of these uses may ultimately be reordered or are of equal weight. Therefore, the panel recommends that the sponsor use this list as a starting point for further evaluation.

## Different Paths for Different Uses at Different Times

Part of understanding the uses and purpose of the pathway system is understanding its users. Paths may be dynamic, serving different functions at different times of the day. During commuting hours, bikes or electric scooters may need to operate at a lower speed to accommodate those who may be traveling by foot. However, at times when paths do not have a lot of traffic, bikes and electric scooters might operate at higher speeds. Other pathways may have a single use. Understanding the users of each section of path is important to ensure that signage and wayfinding, as well as path infrastructure, are tailored to each primary function. For example, some individuals may use a section of the pathway system for exercise or recreation, whereas others might use it to travel to a specific destination.

The panel would like to acknowledge that the system that already exists is an important achievement. However, the panel observed that completing the connections between path segments has become the primary driver of the pathway system. The panel recommends moving purpose and equity, discussed further in this report, to the forefront of the sponsor’s consideration, all while continuing to pursue direct pathway continuity where it serves those key elements. Possibly some paths may serve one use now and another in the future. In the meantime, it is

important to not make places feel incomplete because they are not yet providing infrastructure for all the uses the city ultimately wants to serve.

Some connections will need to wait until a future circumstance in which they can be achieved. Current limitations caused by the need for or conditions of easements may mean that a neighborhood needs to change its mind, a holdout sells to a new owner, a neighborhood purchases an easement, or redevelopment needs to occur to create an opportunity. The panel believes that every connection does not have to be made immediately or before the purpose of the system is served. This is where the panel recommends that the sponsor look to Temporary Routing Alternative Connections, discussed in detail later in this report, as a near-term solution. TRACs can help complete and connect certain key sections of the pathway network as longer-term infrastructure projects come to fruition.

## Telling the Story

An essential part of branding the pathway system is building the story. The briefing book presented the panel with a thoughtful story of the community, the Boise meridian line, and the history of the pathway system. All of these are great elements of a story. The panel recommends that the sponsor continue with this storytelling and revisit and expand it so that storytelling drives the purpose, program, and brand. Every resident should be able to understand that story.

The panel believes that telling the story of the pathway system in Meridian should also provide residents with an understanding of the city’s goals and the challenges surrounding the enhancement and enrichment of this public amenity. Through storytelling, all residents should

- Understand the system as an amenity;
- Understand the challenges of the pathway’s creation and operation;
- Understand the importance of the pathway’s role in community, placemaking, and economic development; and
- Understand the importance of the pathway’s maintenance, its beautification, and investment in it as a community asset.

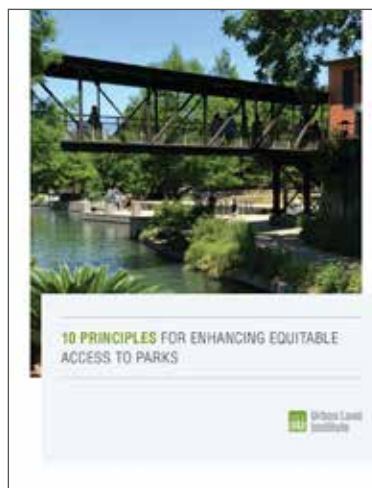
Another important aspect of storytelling is setting community expectations for vision as well as cooperative use with key stakeholders such as irrigation districts and HOAs. It can also act as a mechanism for defining a shared code of conduct and an immediate understanding of the pathway’s purpose, so newcomers quickly understand the protocols and use of the pathways and how best to access this amenity.



## Equity

**A FOCUS ON EQUITY**, along with purpose, can help refine the vision and implementation of pathways in Meridian. The panel recommends that the sponsor first define equity as an element in the Meridian community and then determine a standard for equitable access to the pathway system. One example might be using the standards outlined by the 10 Minute Walk movement, which promotes the belief that all residents of a community should be within a 10-minute walk of a park or green space. The panel observed that the pathways in Meridian have the potential to greatly improve access to the city's parks and open spaces for its residents.

Another source for consideration is ULI's *10 Principles for Enhancing Equitable Access to Parks*. Among other best practices, this publication highlights the need to identify underserved neighborhoods and populations and ensure comparable access to the pathway system. For Meridian, this may include identifying areas where Americans with Disabilities Act access or visual impairment assistance needs to be prioritized. It could also include access and facilities for seniors and young children. While the goal should be equitable access throughout the system, identifying underserved populations and sections of pathway on which to initially focus equitable access efforts is an important first step.



*ULI's 10 Principles for Enhancing Equitable Access to Parks highlights a range of best practices that the panel believes would be beneficial for Meridian to pursue as the city enhances this existing community amenity.*

## THE 10 MINUTE WALK MOVEMENT

Parks are essential to the physical, social, environmental, and economic health of people and communities. Parks help expand the economy by attracting homebuyers, tourists, and highly talented workers. They protect the environment, provide space for the enjoyment of arts and nature, and make people healthier, happier, and more connected.

Despite these known benefits, research shows that one in three Americans—more than 100 million people—do not have a park within a 10-minute walk of their home. 10 Minute Walk is a movement dedicated to improving access to safe, high-quality parks and green spaces in cities—large and small—throughout the United States. Led by the Trust for Public Land (TPL), in partnership with the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) and the Urban Land Institute, and with support from The JPB Foundation, 10 Minute Walk is working to create a world in which, by 2050, all people in U.S. cities live within a 10-minute walk of a park or green space. This partnership drives commitments from city leaders working to achieve this vision and transform their communities.



Nearly 300 U.S. mayors have endorsed 10 Minute Walk so far. ULI, TPL, and NRPA are working with partners in select cities on measurable policies and strategies to advance the 10 Minute Walk vision. Success in this work will require the expertise, creativity, and close collaboration of public- and private-sector leaders. ULI has a powerful role to play in catalyzing its members, networks, and partners around a vision of a green, sustainable, connected, and resilient future for all people. Learn more and connect with 10 Minute Walk at [10minutewalk.org](http://10minutewalk.org) and [uli.org/parks](http://uli.org/parks).

## Applying Equitable Principles

As the sponsor works to connect the pathways within the city, the panel recommends applying equitable principles directly to planning efforts for the pathway system. One example is to design the pathways and surrounding environment for safety and comfort. To reduce the perception that some areas of the pathway system might not be as safe as others, the panel recommends increasing the “eyes on the path” by limiting the height of fences to four feet when possible and using materials that allow some visibility from the path to surrounding houses, consistent with city code.

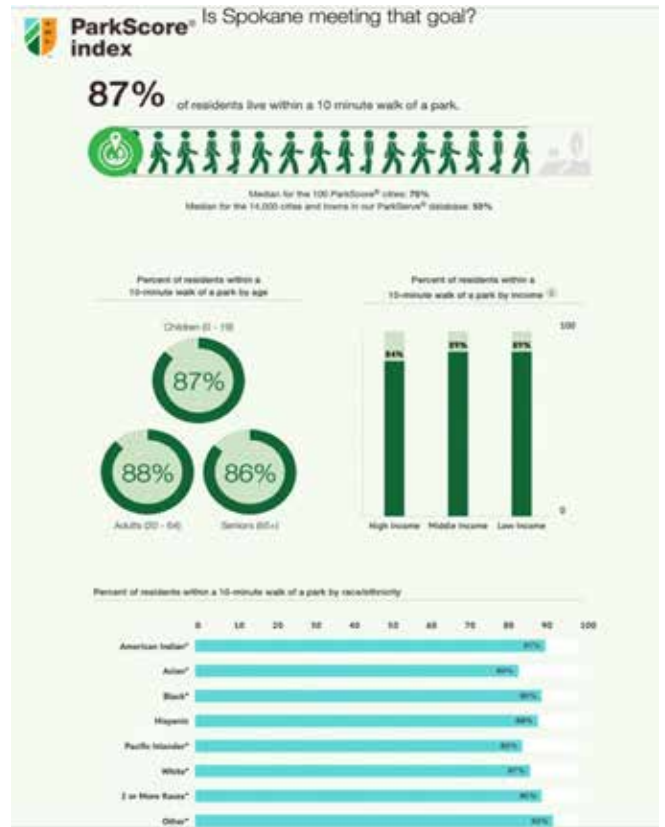
Another example is to involve neighborhoods in the design decisions for the path. The panel understands that the city is already engaging with neighborhoods when working on connecting paths, but the panel recommends that the city take the additional step of engaging neighborhoods in decisions concerning programming and path facilities. Involving the

neighborhood can also provide the sponsor with more information on how the neighborhood wants to use its portion of the system, where it might fit within the pathway hierarchy of uses, and how it might connect to the larger system in the future.

The panel also recommends that the sponsor consider not just the path itself, but what the path provides for residents and what kind of amenity it is. Though they are not health experts, the panelists understand that widely accepted health benefits can be derived from walking, particularly walking in nature. The panel recommends increasing awareness of health benefits to residents when developing a holistic approach to encouraging use of the pathway system. At the same time, the panel recommends that the sponsor think strategically about connecting the pathways to current and future transit opportunities of varying modes, which can help increase resident access to jobs and amenities throughout the city.

## Equity and Funding

The panel recommends that the sponsor prioritize funding with purpose and equity in mind, instead of focusing primarily on completing pathway connections. Specifically, the panel recommends identifying long-term capital improvements for the pathway system and seeking funding through grants and federal sources. By focusing on purpose and equity, the panel believes that opportunities may be found to pursue a wider range of funding sources, including community funding from local businesses and individuals. To apply and maintain these sources of funding, particularly when addressing equity, the panel recommends illustrating the pathway system’s story and progress in graphics that reflect key metrics, such as those used in the ParkScore Index developed by the Trust for Public Land.



An example of the Trust for Public Land’s ParkScore from 2022. The panel recommends that the sponsor use this as an example of one way to track equity metrics and tell the story of the pathway system.



## Pathway User Experience

**THE PANEL WAS ASKED TO EVALUATE THE USER EXPERIENCE** of the pathway system, focusing specifically on brand, wayfinding, and amenity activation. To better understand the pathways and user experience, the panel looked at Meridian's current pathways master plan. From this, the panel identified a few ways to evolve the current master plan to bring user experience front and center.

It is the panel's perspective that a stronger focus on a city center should be highlighted in the plan. The panel recommends further organizing the pathway system in a spoke-and-wheel format that centers on the city center where City Hall Plaza and parking lot are located and evolves from there.

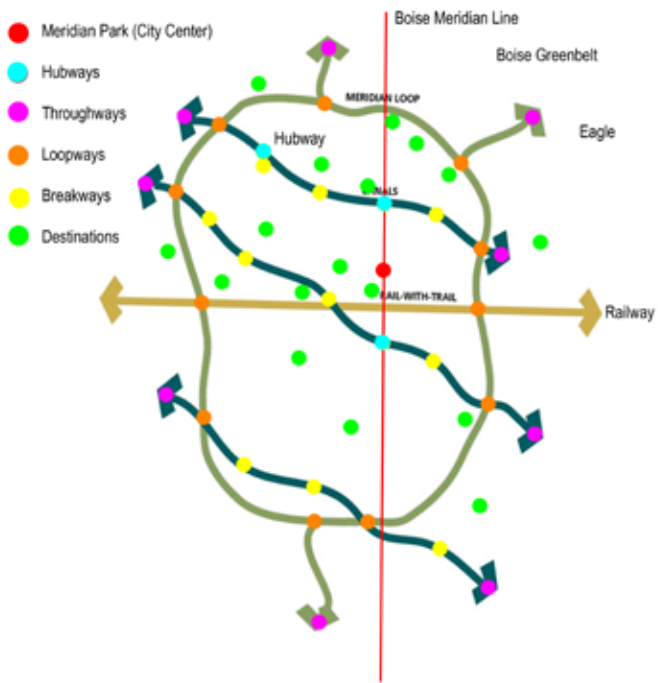
Although the panel primarily focused on the pathway system, the importance of a center for the city as the major hub for the system gained traction during deliberations. The panel believes that this central point of the community could one day be a larger green space called Meridian Park or city square. Including a focus on the city center can also present an opportunity to catalyze development that facilitates a city square environment, prioritizing activity and various land uses such as green space over parking.

The panel also recommends adding the Boise meridian line to the master plan for pathway development because it extends across the city and presents the opportunity to create a north-south connection for all pieces of the pathway system. From there, a circular loopway, possibly expanding upon the one that currently exists, can be established with major thoroughways to facilitate major connections across the system.

### Community and Connections

The panel believes that it is important that public destinations in Meridian connect via the pathway system. This includes amenities and community institutions such as parks, the South YMCA, and the city center, as well as restaurants, schools, and other special places like the Boys and Girls Club or the Meridian Senior Center.

Master Pathways Plan (amended)



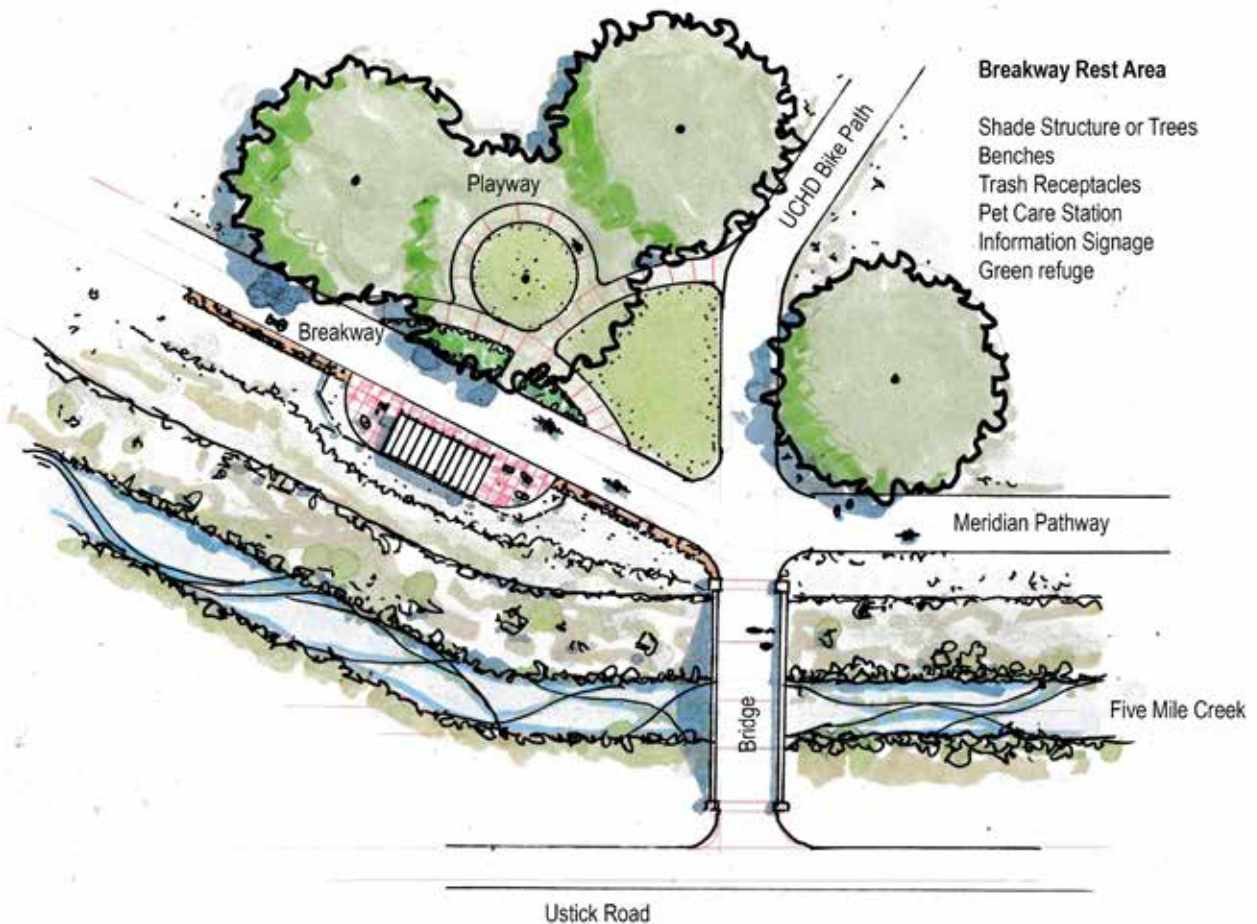
The panel recommends viewing the pathway system as a spoke-and-wheel format centered on the city center.

To facilitate these connections, the panel recommends identifying and clearly marking micro-path access to these destinations. In a perfect world, all paths would connect. However, if the resources are not immediately available to carry out that goal, the panel recommends implementing TRACs. The panel believes that TRACs (discussed in more depth later in this report) can play an important role in making connections across the system and improving access to major community destinations.

### Placemaking and Destinations

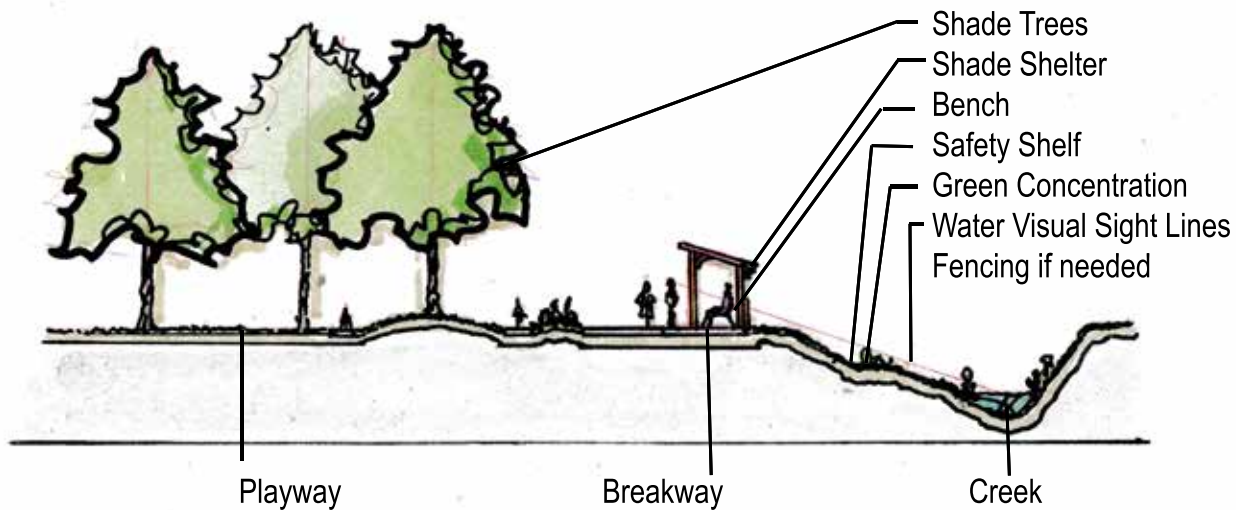
As discussed, destinations such as the city center are an integral part of a pathway system, and identifying these pathway destinations is an important part of the wayfinding and signage approach (discussed later in this section). Since the pathways serve multiple purposes, the panel stresses the importance of adding the identifier “ways” to each pathway type. For example, a hub needed between pathway intersections could be referred to as a “hubway.” Other potential “ways” recommended are “playways” (passive or active play spaces), “waterways,” “natureways,” “historyways,” community “artways,” and “breakways.”

DAN ANDERTON



The panel emphasizes the need to include amenities throughout the pathway system to enhance the user experience. One such amenity could be a “breakway,” where pathway users can stop, get out of the sun, or play along the path.

DAN ANDERTON



DAN ANDERTON

An illustration of user safety features at breakways, such as a safety shelf on the slope toward the creek, that could be used in place of fencing. The panel also recommends laying the grade back far enough so that users have a sight line to the water and do not need to go so close to the edge to see it.



DAN ANDERTON



### Breakway Concept Design Ideas

The city of Meridian provided a tour of the pathways to the panel. During that tour, the group experienced how bright and hot the sun can make the experience of walking along the pathways. Panelists found themselves looking for places to sit with shade. Consistent with the “ways” concept presented, the panel was seeking a break, or “breakway.”

The panel recommends that the city conceptualize breakways as creative, welcoming spaces with signage and information on the surrounding destinations. They should not have transparent roofs, as promotion of shade is the goal. Breakways could also be kiosks or mini shops/food stands, such as places to pause or meet up with friends. The panel also recommends enlisting local artists to build character. The panel recommends that breakways be sited at midblock crossings with appropriate seating to wait and to encourage use of the crossing for safety purposes.



RAMONA ANDERTON

Examples of the type of facilities the panel recommends the sponsor provide at breakways.

To illustrate what might be possible for the pathway system by including amenities such as breakways, the panel provided a sketch of this concept. While breakways can be situated throughout the pathway system, one location where a breakway would be recommended is within one mile of the Five Mile Creek Trailhub.



## Pathway Amenities and Engagement

The panel believes that an opportunity exists to further enhance placemaking efforts and the user experience of the path through pathway amenities and engagement. As observed by the panel, fencing along the path varies in material, transparency, and aesthetics. While the panel understands that fencing in certain areas is required, the type of fencing used could make a notable difference to path user experience. When pathway users can see over or through the fence, the feeling of separation differs from when they cannot. The panel is promoting the idea of a mesh grid or similar structure for the fence instead of chain link. In addition, the panel believes safety in the context needed for most pathway environments can be achieved with a four-foot fence instead of a six-foot fence, which would change the user experience.

User experience and engagement can be further enhanced by adding informational signage and storytelling boards that highlight local wildlife, plant materials, community history, and provide educational opportunities. The panel also recommends storytelling and engagement through art. For example, canvas can be hung from pathway fences to create a temporary exhibit space for art from a local school, or local artists could paint the canvas. However, the goal is a temporary exhibit space that becomes another method of telling the story of the community and the pathway.

The panel also recommends that the sponsor use permanent art, memory pieces, and monuments to enhance the identity and name of each pathway. Perhaps a pathway's name reflects its use and the art and monuments take inspiration from that use. Or perhaps the pathway leads to the destination for which it is named. In this case, the art can reinforce the destination for the users of the path. Ultimately, if everything relates to the path and its use, it becomes its theme, it becomes its story, its name and thus easily identifiable.

## Wayfinding and Identification

Wayfinding and pathway identification, as mentioned previously, are essential to creating a cohesive pathway system that maximizes the benefits of the pathways for all its uses, from a community amenity to a way of getting from one place to another within Meridian.

To facilitate the user experience of the pathway system, the panel recommends that pathways have names that reflect their use, well-known points of interest, or destination. Wayfinding signage



DESIGNWORKSHOP

*An example of a “playway” concept to add placemaking and destinations along the pathway system.*



DAN ANDERTON

*The panel recommends using transparent, four-foot fencing along the pathway instead of chain-link fencing.*



RAMONA ANDERTON

*An example of art along a pathway that can enhance user experience and provide an opportunity to engage with the local community and artists.*

should add to pathway name identification awareness while highlighting the following:

- Route identification;
- Important places along the route and destinations;
- Distance markers; and
- Next rest area (breakway) identification.

The goal is to tell the story of the path using physical signage. The panel also recommends that the sponsor explore additional wayfinding and engagement options for the community that could include technology integrations such as iNaturalist (for more information visit [www.inaturalist.org](http://www.inaturalist.org)) and other geolocational markers.

## Pathway Safety and Maintenance

Safety and maintenance are important elements of user experience. The panel encourages the sponsor to combine safety with memorable pathway elements. Signage painted directly on the path is one way to add user safety in a memorable way. Fencing can also play a notable role in the safety of pathway users. The panel believes that fencing should be used only where safety requires it and encourages the use of four-foot, transparent fencing options discussed in this report. Fencing is most essential in places where pathway users stop or pause and in locations where falling is a high probability, such as at a breakway or similar amenity location. In these areas, the panel

recommends adding a safety shelf on the slope so if a child or adult falls toward the creek, that person would not fall into the canal. Inserting intentional grass or stone can serve as a separator or identifier for a separation between the pathway edge and pedestrians. In residential areas, the panel recommends that the sponsor encourage white fencing (or similar) between residential homes and the pathway.

Safety is also an important consideration in areas where the pathway system includes street intersections or midblock crossings. In situations where it is necessary to connect sections of the pathway system, the panel recommends adding a pedestrian refuge in the middle of multilane intersections or midblock crossings whenever possible. These refuges provide pedestrians and cyclists with the ability to safely stop halfway across the street and can accommodate a wide range of user paces.

Connecting safety and maintenance, consistent control of burr-producing and noxious weeds is essential for a pathway system such as that in Meridian. The panel applauds the current maintenance efforts on the path, which are keeping noxious weeds under control, and appreciates this is an ongoing effort. To facilitate further maintenance and control of weeds, particularly in areas where users might stop or rest, the panel recommends delineating a safety zone with stones or grass along the edges of the pathway or breakway/hubway to define user space and separate it from more natural environments.

The panel also recommends additional clarity and transparency about pathway maintenance. Pathway maintenance schedules need to be published in a manner that clearly indicates for pathway users what work is being done and when it will approximately occur. The panel also recommends identifying and clarifying which routes and maintenance services are allocated to which responsible party and which are shared. Based on stakeholder feedback and observation, further exploration of the type of maintenance vehicle used on the pathway may increase user comfort. Alternate terrain vehicles have a lower profile than larger maintenance trucks and may be perceived as more approachable to pathway users when maintenance is occurring on an open section of path.

Continuing consistent pathway waystation trash pickup and services is also essential. As new amenities are added to the pathway, clarity about who is responsible for such maintenance and the budget necessary will be important. Also, when a temporary closure occurs, a clear indication of the detour route is essential for pathway users. The panel believes that these efforts in addition to consistent maintenance of the pathway system will be essential for the positive experience of pathway users.



DAN ANDERTON

*Not all safety measures need to be only utilitarian. Pathway signage can be creative and effective.*



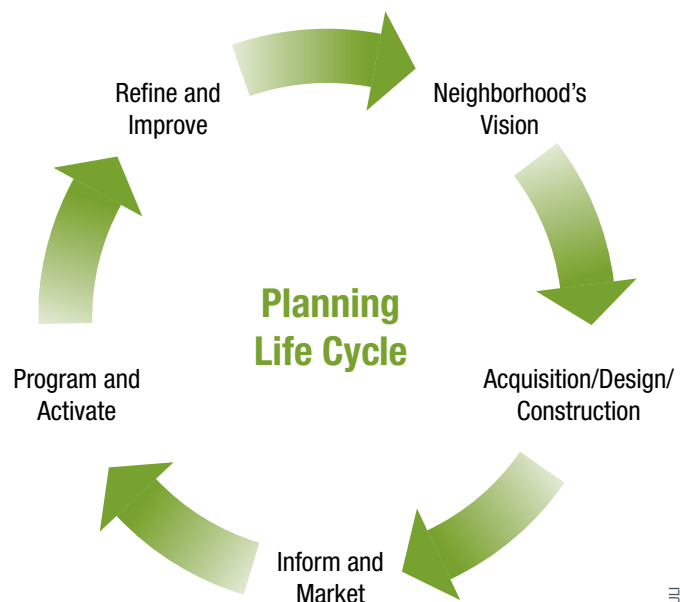
## Implementation and Coordination

**MERIDIAN HAS MADE SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS** on creating a recreational pathway system based on visionary planning. These efforts have created many pathways in some areas of the community and perceptions of inequitable implementation in others.

There is a natural tension that occurs because of opportunistic implementation. This approach is a long-term plan which, eventually, will result in a comprehensive system but in the short term generates gaps and discontinuities. The panel noted the approach to date for addressing discontinuities is to explain the reasons and hope to address the issues as soon as possible. The panel recommends several strategies to help either accelerate the process or bridge the gap until the full pathway system vision can be implemented. The panel recommends planning implementation of each new effort in a cyclical fashion, starting with a neighborhood vision, continuing through the project's design and construction, and moving to refinement and improvement over time.

### Bridging Gaps with TRACs

The panel recommends taking an archeologist's approach to completing and connecting pathways moving forward. This means identifying where the asset is and, if it is not possible



to implement now, waiting for the technology, or in this case attitudes, funding, and opportunity, to catch up. However, this does not mean doing nothing. In the meantime, the panel recommends using Temporary Routing Alternative Connections, or TRACs, to identify appropriate links where these gaps occur because of a lack of easements, funding, or similar factors.

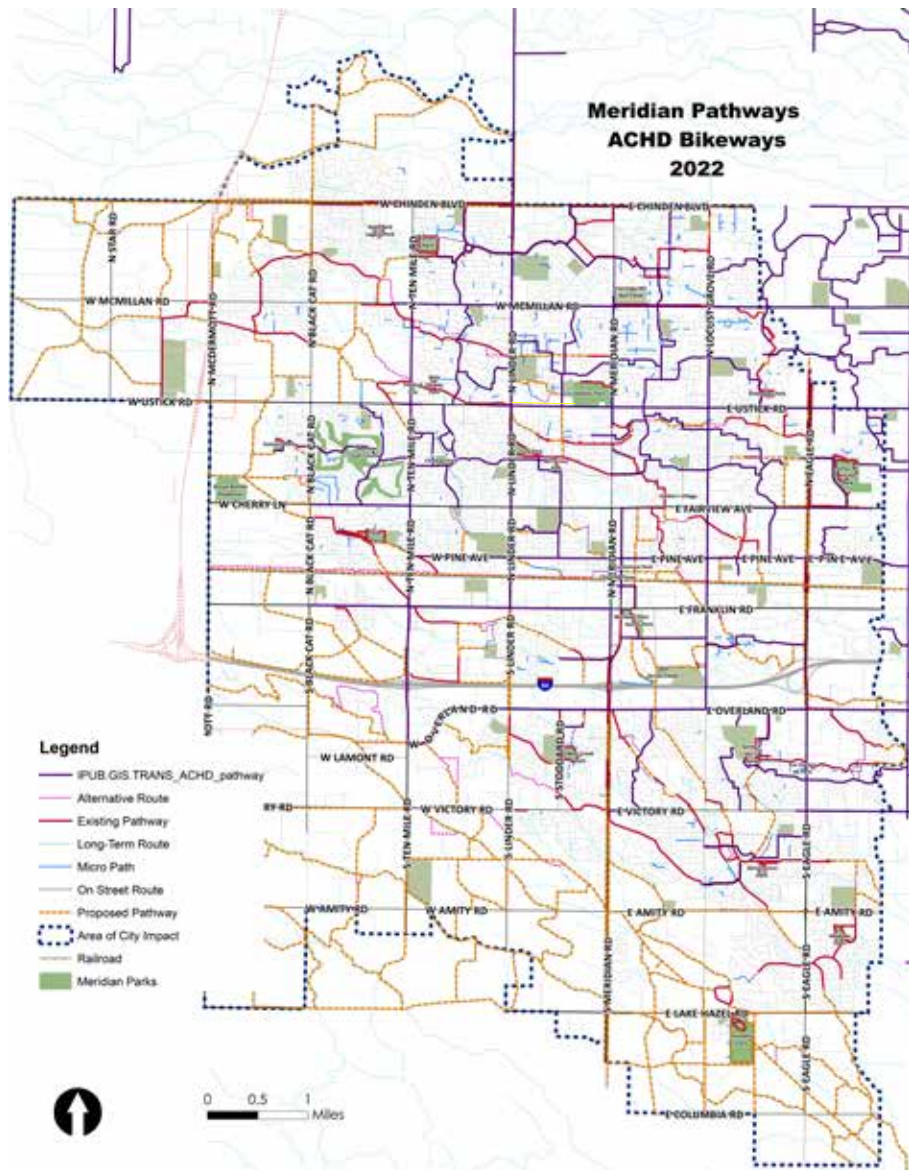
These alternative connections can take several forms, including roadway connections for bicycles and sidewalk connections for pedestrians. The panel was asked to recommend an approach to completing the connections in an example study area. While an easement would be an ideal, long-term solution, it is not currently feasible. Therefore, the panel recommends using TRACs.

By overlaying the existing pathways map with the map of the pedestrian and bicycle routes provided by ACHD, the panel was

able to identify an alternative route using existing bike lanes and sidewalks that can connect the two paths within the study area. Ultimately, the purpose of the TRACs connections is to provide users with preferred alignments to navigate between existing sections of trail until missing segments are constructed.



This map focused on Study Area Two illustrates the potential to use the existing ACHD pathways and bikeways (in purple) to connect existing Meridian pathway segments (in red) that do not currently connect.



This map illustrates how completing pathways with TRACs facilitated by using ACHD bikeway infrastructure could create more pathways. The panel overlaid the pathway system map with the ACHD map.



ULI's *Empowering Community: An Engagement Toolkit for South Sacramento* is an example of one approach for developing a resource to assist neighborhoods in participating in the pathway development process.

## Neighborhood Empowerment

As the Meridian pathway system reaches critical mass and increases in visibility and popularity, more neighborhoods will seek connectivity—something that is already starting to occur. The panel believes that a key strategy for closing gaps and making connections in the system is to empower neighborhoods to identify the preferred solution for their area. For some neighborhoods the preferred solution may be permanent alternative routing around their section of lateral or drain. For others it may be the dedication of easements to the city for construction of a pathway connection adjacent to the irrigation facility behind their homes. The panel recommends that the sponsor provide a neighborhood toolkit to help guide interested neighborhoods through the process of identifying their preferred solution and working with the city and irrigation districts (if applicable) to implement their preferred approach.

Examples of specific neighborhood empowerment tools and organizations that the panel believes are applicable for Meridian include neighborhood crowdfunding approaches to help implement programs and improvements like a “friends of” program to assist neighborhood residents to informally organize for grants.

## Continuous Process Improvement

On the basis of its observations and feedback from stakeholder interviews, the panel recommends that the sponsor seek ways to continuously improve, streamline, and clarify the pathways

creation and maintenance process. The panel recommends focusing on the following:

- Continue information sharing with neighboring jurisdictions on forms, mutual issues, and beneficial approaches to resolving challenges.
- Develop a template to address recurring issues with pathway creation and pathway and facility maintenance for items such as fences, shelters, landscaping, and weed control. The template would also clarify responsible parties, such as the developer, the irrigation authority, and the city.
- Create maintenance agreements for developers and HOAs.
- Continue to offer partial or full open-space credits for developers who provide amenities and landscaping beyond an asphalt path on the irrigation authority easement.
- Work with additional irrigation authorities to extend benefits of “recreational use” immunity for pathways.

## Economic Development

Pathways and trails are often associated with recreation and resident amenities, as is true in Meridian. The panel also believes that the pathway system presents opportunities for the community’s economic development.

As discussed in reference to the user experience, one purpose of the pathway system supported by the panel is to connect destinations. Meridian has established “Centers of Growth” within its Comprehensive Plan, and the panel recommends using the pathways to connect these centers—Ten Mile Crossing, downtown Meridian, and The Village.

The panel also recommends identifying areas of opportunity for new trail-adjacent activity nodes that could feature mixed-use or restaurant and retail development. The Five Mile Creek Pathway



*Press Café, along the Trinity River in Fort Worth, Texas, is an example of trail-adjacent development that can be facilitated through an overlay or new zoning along the pathway system in designated areas.*

Trailhub is one such possibility, and there could be others. Pursuing the development of activity nodes would likely require creating an overlay zone or new zoning designation for this trail-adjacent development. Examples of activity nodes include areas along the Greenbelt in Boise, Idaho, and Garden City; the Trinity River Trail in Fort Worth, Texas; and River Walk in Spokane, Washington.

## Leveraging Partnerships and Coordination

Based on briefing materials and information gathered in stakeholder interviews, it is evident to the panel that Meridian does not control its own destiny for pathways on irrigation facilities, pathways within road rights-of-way, or bike lanes on roadways. Because of the importance of the irrigation authorities, ACHD, Idaho Department of Transportation, Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho (COMPASS), HOAs, owners of portions of paths, and others in the planning, implementation, and maintenance of Meridian's pathway system, the panel believes the city should proactively work with each of these entities to implement the city's vision.

To facilitate implementation of Meridian's vision for pathways, the panel recommends that the sponsor convene a meeting of the stakeholder groups mentioned above to coordinate a mutual understanding of goals and vision. The panel believes it is also necessary to update the city's agreement with NMID to reflect updated needs associated with the pathway system, potentially applying successes from similar agreements in neighboring jurisdictions. The panel also recommends the sponsor seek to establish agreements with other irrigation districts and participate in the development process with NMID to ensure that city goals are met.

The panel strongly recommends that the sponsor work with ACHD and ITD, where appropriate, to find ways to complete pathways immediately using existing pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure maintained by these entities in Meridian. The first step can be using geographic information system layers to overlay each entity's infrastructure with the pathway system to identify key areas of connection to complete the hub-and-spoke organization proposed by the panel and connect major recreational destinations.

## Implementation Capacity

Possessing or accessing the right resources is essential to building the capacity for implementation. The panel recommends that the sponsor seek to ensure that the resources—vision and commitment, funding, and people—to elevate the pathway system for Meridian are in place.

### Vision and Commitment

Over the course of the assignment, the panel learned that Meridian has both a vision for the pathway system and significant commitment. The panel recommends revisiting and reconfirming the commitment to the vision of the pathways program and moving it to the next level, making sure the pathways are critical and key components of the vision for Meridian's future. It is also an opportunity to leverage the investments already made in this system to fulfill goals and ensure that community priorities are met.

### Funding

Capital funding is essential to achieve the vision of the pathway system, and the panel believes that distributing funds over several years is essential to know how much funding is available and to make certain that projects are completed. The panel also recommends identifying additional funding sources, such as federal funding in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, state funding, and corporate and foundation grants. As noted in this report, funding may also be available to address identified equity needs for the pathway system.

### People

The panel recognizes that in local government, the staff is critical to ensuring that a vision is achieved. The panel believes that having sufficient staff resources focused on this effort is essential for implementation. Based on an understanding of the current scope of work for city staff and major efforts proposed by the panel, a summary follows of the essential tasks that need to be completed for Meridian's pathways vision:

- Develop and coordinate neighborhood empowerment process.
- Oversee Pathways Master Plan update and implementation.
- Coordinate with partner agencies and adjacent jurisdictions.
- Participate in development review process.
- Maintain and coordinate pathways GIS and mapping information.

- Manage right-of-way acquisition and design of new pathways.
- Program foodways, playways, waterways, artways, and other activities and amenities.
- Coordinate maintenance and upkeep through city and agreements.
- Manage special projects, including artways, wayfinding, and branding.

The panel recommends having a conversation to ensure that the right mix of staff and professionals are at the table to help with implementation. This could include outside consultants, identifying a need for staff specifically focused on one element of implementation, such as the in-house right-of-way

coordinator in neighboring jurisdictions. The panel recommends thinking strategically about outsourcing certain elements of implementation, such as updating the pathways master plan.

The panel believes that the Meridian pathway system is already on its way to being a notable asset for the community, and finding the right mix of professionals both in house and outside can provide the capacity to accomplish the full scope of work for the system to fulfill the vision.

## Implementation Guide

A critical next step for the sponsor is converting recommendations and plans to action. The following chart provides a summary of the recommendations provided by the panel and an overarching timeline for these actions.

### Implementation Guide

<b>Purpose and Storytelling</b>	<b>Short term</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify a hierarchy of uses for the pathway system.</li> </ul>
	<b>Ongoing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Move purpose and equity to the forefront of consideration.</li> <li>• Use storytelling to drive the purpose, program, and brand of the pathways. Every resident should be able to understand that story.</li> </ul>
<b>Equity</b>	<b>Short term</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determine a standard for equitable access.</li> <li>• Identify underserved neighborhoods and populations and ensure access to the system.</li> </ul>
	<b>Medium term</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase awareness of health benefits to residents when developing a holistic approach to encouraging use of the pathway system.</li> <li>• Prioritize funding with purpose and equity in mind, instead of completing pathway connections.</li> </ul>
	<b>Ongoing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Illustrate the pathway system’s story and progress in graphics that reflect key metrics.</li> <li>• Apply equitable principles directly to planning efforts for the pathway system. Consider not just the path itself, but what the path provides for residents as an amenity.</li> </ul>

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## User Experience

### Short term

- Start the process of updating the Pathways Master Plan to incorporate intentional user experience and storytelling elements.
  - Identify locations and priorities for breakways.
  - Identify community partners for artways.
  - Use the art selection for the Pathway Trailhub as a first step in renaming pathways to reflect their identifiable character and purpose.
- Design first breakway in study area segment.
- Add grading and assess other safety measures to recently completed pathways alongside irrigation waterways.
- Connect public destinations within the community and clearly mark micro-path access to these destinations.
- Add the identifier “ways” to each theme of pathway. For example, a hub needed between pathway intersections could be referred to as a “hubway.”
- When installing fencing, use mesh grid or similar structure for the fence instead of chain link. Keep fence heights to four feet instead of six to further enhance the user experience.
- Name pathways to reflect their use, well-known points of interest, or destination.

### Medium term

- Organize the pathway system in a spoke-and-wheel format, adding the Boise meridian line and emphasizing the city center as a gathering place and hub of the pathway system.
- Add informational signage and storytelling boards along fencing that highlight local wildlife, plant materials, and community history, and provide educational opportunities.
- Use permanent art, memory pieces, and monuments to enhance the identity and name of each pathway.
- Use wayfinding signage that adds to pathway name identification awareness, route identification, important places along the route, destinations, distance markers, and the distance to the next rest area.
- Add fencing in areas where pathway users stop or pause and in locations where falls are a higher probability, such as at a breakway or similar amenity location.
- Create a place of refuge in the middle of multilane intersections or midblock crossings whenever possible.

### Ongoing

- Provide consistent control of noxious weeds and continue regular maintenance of the pathways.
- Provide clarity and transparency about pathway maintenance. Pathway maintenance schedules need to be published in a manner that clearly indicates to pathway users what work is being done and when it will approximately occur.
- Identify and clarify which routes and maintenance services are assigned to which responsible party and which are shared.

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## Implementation

### Short term

- Develop and coordinate a neighborhood empowerment program.
- Coordinate across all entities engaged in connectivity.
- Use TRACs to complete and connect certain key sections of the pathway network as longer-term infrastructure projects come to fruition.
- Overlay the existing pathways map with the map of the pathway system and the pedestrian and bicycle routes provided by ACHD to identify an alternative route using existing bike lanes and sidewalks to connect the two paths within the Meridian system.
- Work with ACHD and ITD to find ways to complete pathways immediately using existing pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure maintained by these entities in Meridian.

### Medium term

- Use the pathways to connect centers of growth highlighted in the Comprehensive Plan, including Ten Mile, downtown Meridian, and The Village.
- Identify areas of opportunity for new trail-adjacent activity nodes that could feature mixed-use or restaurant and retail development.
- Have a conversation to ensure that the right mix of staff and professionals are at the table to help with implementation.

### Long term

- Revisit and reconfirm the commitment and the vision to the pathway program and ensure the pathways are a critical and key component of the city's vision for the future.
- Take an archeologist's approach to completing and connecting pathways. Identify where the asset is, and if it is not possible to implement now, wait for technology, attitudes, funding, and opportunity to catch up.
- To close gaps and make connections in the system, focus on empowering neighborhoods to identify the preferred solution for their area.

### Ongoing

- Distribute funds over several years to know how much funding is available and to make certain that projects are completed.
- Identify additional funding sources, such as federal funding in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, state funding, and corporate and foundation grants.
- Seek ways to continuously improve, streamline, and clarify the pathway creation and maintenance process.



## Conclusion

**MERIDIAN'S PATHWAY SYSTEM** provides a valuable amenity to residents. The panel applauds the consistent efforts of the sponsor to continue to connect and further establish the pathway system. The panel believes that by embracing temporary connections through coordination with local and regional transportation entities and irrigation districts, the sponsor can take notable steps to advance its vision of a complete, extensive pathway system for residents. At the same time, shifting focus and energy away from permanent connections that have a longer timeline, the sponsor can begin work to develop pathway identity, define equity, and build the amenities needed to make pathways in Meridian an even stronger community asset.

# About the Panel

## Christine C. Richman

Panel Chair  
Salt Lake City, Utah

Richman is economic analyst/principal in charge at GSBS Consulting in Salt Lake City. She believes that a key component of successful developments and communities is long-term economic sustainability. She specializes in finding creative solutions to difficult economic development, planning, and government issues and problems. She is skilled at identifying the core issue and developing solutions that meet the needs of disparate interests. Flexible, incremental development concepts are her specialty. Her strategies can be implemented over time in response to market factors while maintaining a cohesive identity. Her projects include real estate market analysis, redevelopment planning and tax increment area creation, master planning, economic development strategic planning, and economic impacts analysis.

## Daniel Anderton

Hampton, Virginia

Anderton has a design career of more than 30 years and has been directly involved in the creation of communities both nationally and internationally, covering all aspects of land use planning and physical design, including comprehensive and master planning, urban and mixed-use design, entitlement site planning, redevelopment planning, affordable housing, rezoning, subdivision planning, community revitalization, main street retail design, wayfinding and signage, placemaking, parks and recreation design, and landscape architecture. He has proven project design experience in the applicability of planning, zoning, and subdivision, and he also has extensive experience working with stakeholders, local and state government development review processes, and in creating effective working relationships with jurisdictional agencies, boards, commissions, and the public.

He is currently employed by Dewberry, a national planning, engineering, and architectural firm, and is responsible for community planning and urban design within the company. He has worked for architects, engineers, landscape architects, and horticulturalists throughout his career, giving him a unique and holistic perspective of community planning, urban design, and landscape architecture.

He has a goal to create community environments that are memorable, comfortable, sustainable, and inclusive to a wide demographic of visitors, residents, and business owners while also being marketable for public and/or private developers. He takes care to ensure that a conceptual design's integrity, density, and sense of place are maintained through the planning process. By carefully planning floor/area ratio and densities, providing a mix of diverse building and product types and phasing, and incorporating traditional and neo-traditional design styles, his community developments are poised to fulfill the needs of the market and a wide cross section of prospective renters, buyers, visitors, and shop owners.

Anderton has been involved with, and completed, hundreds of projects involving direct interaction with citizens, developers, architects, planning boards, county councils, mayors, public utilities, transportation officials, and other involved parties. The juggling of everyone's interests throughout the completion of a plan or project is extremely important. The goal is to go through the design and planning process with the majority of stakeholders feeling as though they have succeeded in having their personal vision incorporated into the community.

Anderton graduated with a bachelor of landscape architecture and environmental planning degree from Utah State University in 1983 and with a master's of landscape architecture from the University of Illinois in 1985 with an emphasis on behavioral design and placemaking.

## Dan Slone

Midlothian, Virginia

Slone helps innovative clients realize their vision. With a background in real estate, environmental, land use, and nonprofit law, he uses law as a tool to help clients achieve pedestrian-oriented, regenerative communities that are resilient and sustainable. He helps them create the right entities, put together the appropriate strategies, overcome impediments, and draft effective contracts and controls for the new types of relationships they create.

He is the author of fiction and nonfiction books and articles, a speaker who has presented around the world and given a TEDx talk, and an advocate for better design of human settlements and support lands to ensure a thriving animal and plant future.



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