



CITY OF MERIDIAN AND CITY OF GARDEN CITY

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CONTACT: Kaycee Emery, 208-489-0538, kemery@meridiancity.org

Meridian and Garden City Urge County to Cover Courthouse Costs Fairly

MERIDIAN – Leaders of the cities of Meridian and Garden City want to help the Board of Ada County Commissioners find a way to fund the County Courthouse without making residents in Meridian and Garden City pay more than other taxpayers in the county. This is an issue that has been a point of contention for more than a decade. City leaders have tried for years to put this issue to rest and are now urging County Commissioners to stop the pursuit of this unfair practice of forcing select cities to pay again or provide unnecessary court facilities; which would result in a decentralized court system, costing taxpayers hundreds of thousands of dollars.

“It's serious, it's looming, and if it goes a direction other than our desired outcome – it will impact Meridian and Garden City citizens unfairly,” said Mayor Tammy de Weerd, City of Meridian, during her State of the City address on Wednesday, February 3, 2016.

The issue dates back to 1994 when the District Court entered an order directing that the cities of Meridian and Garden City to provide magistrate court facilities. But in 1996, Ada County voters decided it would be beneficial for one centralized courthouse in Boise, where all traffic, misdemeanor and felonies would be handled, making the 1994 court order obsolete. And in 2002, Meridian and Garden City were invited to participate in the use of the courthouse without the mention of a monetary contribution.

“In 2004 we offered to house a courthouse facility within City Hall, which was in the early planning stages, and commissioners determined they did not want to decentralize services. That was the time to discuss the 1994 order,” said De Weerd.

In 2010, Ada County sent a letter to Meridian, and Garden City demanding each city provide a facility for misdemeanor and infraction cases or pay \$660,000 each year to Ada County to fulfill its “obligation”. The cities engaged in numerous meetings with the Courts and Ada County without resolution.

Now the County wants these two cities to either pay or provide separate court facilities. The County is only asking payment from Meridian and Garden City – so Eagle, Star and Kuna residents would not have to pay. This means taxpayers in Meridian and Garden City would pay for services in their taxes to the county and again through city taxes – for unnecessary courts.

“We do not agree with the county’s effort to use an obsolete 22 year old court order as leverage to force a payment by the citizens residing in our cities,” said Mayor John Evans, City of Garden City.

“Our hope is the Commissioners will join us, Garden City and Meridian, during the required ‘whether and how’ administrative hearing in front of 11 District judges in agreement that the 1994 order was

satisfied with the consolidated facility. We can then join together as six cities and one county to ask the legislature to increase court fees that haven't changed since the 1970's to pay for our courts. Taxpayers already pay for courts through their county taxes; if the funding isn't adequate to cover costs, this is a countywide issue and all citizens should cover the costs," said De Weerd.

TIMELINE of EVENTS

1994: The District Court entered an order directing the City of Meridian and Garden City to provide a magistrate court facility in Meridian and Garden City, to offset the City of Boise's facility at Barrister.

*No request was made of additional cities in Ada County

*No public hearing was ever held on the issue.

*By September of 1995, Ada County decided to provide a consolidated courthouse facility at the county's expense.

1996: Voters decided it would be beneficial for one centralized courthouse in Boise where all traffic, misdemeanor and felonies would be handled.

*The 1994 order became obsolete.

2002: The new Ada County Courthouse opened and served as the county building for all court related issues.

2004: The City of Meridian begins plans for the new City Hall. There was discussion that Ada County services could be housed in the new building for residents, but Ada County Commissioners determined they did not want to decentralize the services or if they did, it would be at a County facility on County owned property.

2009: At the prompting of Ada County Commissioners, the 4th District Court held a meeting to demand the cities provide a facility by October 2009. The cities advised the court that budgets were already set and therefore they could not comply. The court did not mandate any additional action at that time.

2010: Ada County sent a letter to Meridian, and Garden City demanding the cities provide a facility to take misdemeanor and infraction cases, or pay \$660,000 each year to Ada County to fulfill its "obligation".

* The cities engaged in numerous meetings with the Courts and Ada County without resolution.

Ada County then filed two lawsuits. One was to enforce the 1994 order and compel the cities to provide court facilities and the second was to seek damages for not providing court facilities in compliance with the 1994 order.

2012: The cities argued before the panel of District Judges of the 4th Judicial District that the original 1994 order should be vacated. The panel denied that request. The cities then appealed that decision to the Idaho Supreme Court.

2013: The Idaho Supreme Court determined that the original court order from 1994 was for the 4th District Court and Ada County to begin a dialogue with the cities of Meridian and Garden City, and that no decision had been made. The court further directed that rules of procedure be adopted so that the cities could have a suitable process in place to assess whether a facility needed to be built and if so, then what.

2016: The cities have asked for the lawsuit for damages to be dismissed because of the Supreme Court's ruling and because the County failed to file the proper claims that are necessary in a timely manner.

The Administrative process still remains: The hearing directed by the Supreme Court to determine whether and how the cities should provide courthouse facilities still needs to take place.

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The City of Meridian is located in the center of the Treasure Valley in southwest Idaho. Founded in 1893 and incorporated as a city in 1903, Meridian is now one of Idaho's largest and fastest growing communities. Meridian is cited by Money Magazine as one of its Top 50 Best Places to Live, and by America's Promise Alliance and ING as one of the nation's 100 Best Communities for Young People. For more information, visit www.meridiancity.org.