



## **CASE STUDY:** **MERIDIAN, MISSISSIPPI**

**Execution drives results.** When communities move beyond discussion to focused action, they bring together partners, strengthen existing assets, improve infrastructure, and attract measurable investment.

Meridian, Mississippi, demonstrates what focused, collaborative action can produce.

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### **The Situation**

Once Mississippi's largest city and a major rail and manufacturing hub, Meridian experienced decades of decline:

- Downtown disinvestment
- Population loss
- Vacant historic buildings
- Fragmented public leadership
- Erosion of civic confidence

The deteriorating Threefoot Building — Mississippi's tallest skyscraper in 1929 — became a visible symbol of decline.

The question was not, "How do we land a big company?"

The question became, "How do we rebuild momentum?"

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### **Strategic Change (2016 Forward)**

Led by the East Mississippi Business Development Corporation (EMBDC) and the Alliance for Growth, Meridian adopted a focused regional strategy centered on:

- Business retention and expansion
- Workforce and education alignment
- Downtown revitalization
- Infrastructure readiness
- Targeted industrial recruitment
- Public-private collaboration
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The plan was intentionally integrated, linking workforce, quality of life, infrastructure, and recruitment. More importantly, it was executed.

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## **Key Tactical Moves**

### **1. Downtown as an Economic Asset**

Meridian invested in its historic core:

#### **Threefoot Hotel (2019)**

The long-vacant Threefoot Building was sold for redevelopment and reopened as a 131-room Marriott Tribute Portfolio hotel with rooftop amenities — transforming a liability into a sign of progress.

#### **The MAX (2018)**

Mississippi Arts + Entertainment Experience strengthened tourism and regional identity.

#### **Mississippi Children’s Museum – Meridian (2021)**

Added sustained downtown activity and family engagement.

#### **MSU Riley Center**

Anchored cultural and conference activity.

Downtown shifted from a decline narrative to a growth narrative.

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### **2. Workforce & Education Pipeline Development**

Meridian strengthened its talent pipeline at every stage:

#### **Leader In Me (2019)**

Embedded leadership, accountability, and life skills into K-12 education.

#### **Mississippi State University – Meridian Campus Expansion**

- Master of Physician Assistant Studies
- Master of Science in Nursing
- Doctoral-level healthcare programs
- Interprofessional Simulation Program

This helped build momentum in the community.

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### **3. Business Retention & Expansion**

Meridian prioritized supporting and growing its existing businesses.

Notable wins include:

- **Progressive Pipeline (Castle)** – retained HQ; \$5M+ expansion; 25 new jobs
- **Ochsner Rush Health (2022)** – \$6M facility & technology investment

- **Shloop Footwear (2023)** – 50+ new jobs
- **Atlas Roofing (2024)** – new 11,000 sq. ft. corporate office

This retention and expansion created stability and community confidence.

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#### **4. Infrastructure Preparation & Intergovernmental Alignment**

City and County governments aligned to invest in:

- Water and sewer upgrades
- \$4M site development grant
- I-20/59 industrial site preparation

The community developed additional growth assets.

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#### **5. Targeted Industrial Recruitment**

With infrastructure ready and leadership aligned, Meridian secured:

##### **Compass Datacenters (2025)**

- \$10 Billion investment over 8 years
- Hundreds of construction jobs
- ~300+ permanent jobs
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This project did not happen by chance. It was the result of sustained preparation and progress over several years.

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#### **Measurable Outcomes**

Over the past decade, Meridian has:

- Revitalized its downtown
  - Expanded advanced healthcare training programs
  - Strengthened K-12 leadership development
  - Retained and expanded major employers
  - Improved city-county collaboration
  - Secured a transformational \$10B investment
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#### **Leadership Lessons for Other Boards & Community Leaders**

1. Focus on a few vital priorities.
  2. Align public, private, and educational partners.
  3. Invest in your existing assets before chasing outside solutions.
  4. Execute consistently over multiple years.
  5. Celebrate your wins, build momentum.
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#### **Summary**

Meridian's ongoing progress is not accidental.

It is the product of focused strategy, aligned leadership, and daily execution.

Leaders are focused.

They work together to execute daily.  
And they understand that if the community wins, everyone wins.  
And Meridian's momentum continues to grow.

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*"Thank you to the Porteras for investing their time, talents, and energy into our community - listening to, leading, and guiding our business leaders and elected leaders in collaborative, common-sense (and COOL) growth!"*

*-Bill Hannah, President & CEO of the East Mississippi Business Development Corporation.*