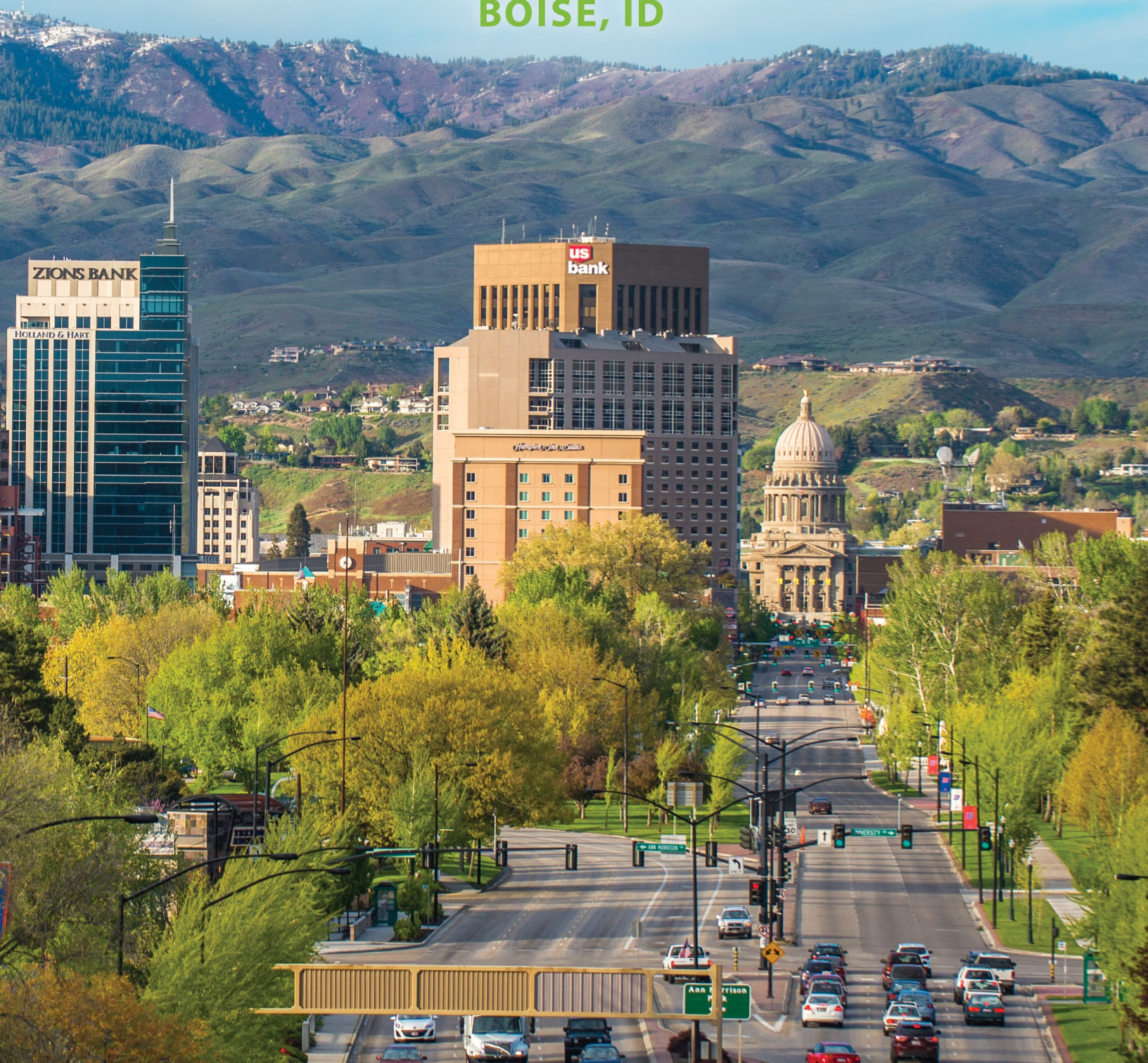



# 2017 COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP VISIT

BOISE, ID





In September of 2017, a delegation of 80 business and community leaders from the Springfield region traveled to Boise, Idaho, for the Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce's 24th annual Community Leadership Visit to learn more about best practices that hold promise for our own community.

## Foreword: The More Things Change ...

"Boise is proud of who they are. They know why their city is a wonderful place to live, and they celebrate those positives. We can do that, too. We have many unique and world class assets. We can do incredible things if we come together and focus on what makes us great."

— Doug Neff, Commerce Bank  
2018 Chairman, Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce

Boise, Idaho is unique.

Most city leaders—those worth their salt, anyway—will say their city is unique. But the people of Boise have made it a point to live their uniqueness and embrace their idiosyncrasies. It is a thriving metropolis with a small-town feel, geographically isolated and yet welcoming and inclusive, equally proud of its commitment to the outdoors and its technology sector.

Springfield leaders have been to Boise for the Community Leadership Visit before, in 1997. But it's not surprising that Boise was chosen as the first location for a repeat CLV visit; the city is almost unrecognizable to those who were on the trip 20 years ago. The metro area has more than doubled in population as people from the West Coast flock to the area because of its high job growth and quality of life. Numerous national publications list the city as among the best places to live, work, start a business and raise a family.

It wasn't always this way.

In the 80s and 90s, the city's downtown was in trouble. Its central commercial district, like so many others nationwide, was floundering and city leaders were torn about how to fix it. Paralysis

about whether to build a shopping mall in center city or in the suburbs led to a downtown so empty that one major developer recalls his mother sitting in the window of a downtown deli and waving to passersby, just so they'd think there was something going on. National magazines wrote articles about how Boise was trying to kill its downtown.

What changed?

Many things ... but also, very little (again, those idiosyncrasies). It took strong, forward-looking leaders with a love for their city and a vision for what it could be. It took support—moral, political and financial—from the community for that vision. And it took input and buy-in from everyone ... business and government leaders, educators, the not-for-profit community and citizens ... to make that vision real and attainable.

Those lessons are contained in this report. And ironically, they're anything but unique. They are the hallmarks of nearly every city toured during one of our Community Leadership Visits in the past. But they offer a reminder of what a city can do when everyone comes together to build something better.

It's a lesson Boise continues to learn. It's one Springfield can learn, too.



# Finding Natural Strengths – and Building New Ones

Geographically, Boise is unusually isolated – sitting on a high plain situated between mountain foothills and desert, a four-hour drive to the nearest large city (Salt Lake City, Utah, to the south). That isolation has led to a unique dichotomy: self-sufficiency and entrepreneurship, combined with a desire to be welcoming and inclusive.

“Our remoteness is an obvious point, but that is one of the things that has been really good to us,” says Mayor David Bieter. “It has made us more self-sufficient; it’s caused us to have to do things locally.”

The city capitalizes on its natural strengths. One of the biggest is the outdoor environment. Boise has made a conscious decision to embrace and protect its natural beauty, whether it’s the Boise and Payette rivers that run through the area, the 110 parks scattered throughout the city and the region, or the two voter-approved taxes to buy land in the foothills and protect it from overdevelopment.

Having access to outdoor recreation is key to attracting and retaining talent to the area. Locals call it “the second paycheck.”

“Offering the ability to play hard and have fun that doesn’t cost a lot of money – that’s a great tool for recruiting people,” says Boise PR and marketing professional Steve Stuebner. “It’s about enriching and improving people’s quality of life.”

Another part of the draw, according to real estate developer Mike Brown, is that the city just offers less “friction” than its West Coast counterparts. He offers a relatively mundane example: getting a haircut. “In L.A., I wouldn’t blink an eye at having a 40-minute drive, spending 20 minutes to park and then paying \$50 for a haircut,” he said. “Even downtown, you don’t have that here.”

It could be that emphasis on quality of life and work-life balance that have made people so gosh-darn nice. Locals have a name for that too: “Boise nice.” And it’s everyone, from lifelong Boiseans to transplants like

"In Boise, YPs show up in town with a kayak, Subaru, and an engineering degree and only then do they start looking for a job and an accompanying paycheck. Springfield is blessed with much of this same outdoors appeal, and we could attract people to build a base for sustained community growth for generations."

- Denise Silvey, Paul Mueller Co.



Boise Chamber President Bill Connors, who's lived in Boise for nine years. "There's definitely a Boise nice factor," says Connors, who had been CEO of a trade association in Washington, D.C. "As a cynical East Coast guy, I noticed it right away."

With that magic combination of outdoor activities, relatively low cost of living (compared to the West Coast), and a pervasive attitude of niceness, it's no surprise the city has attracted massive immigration—especially from, as Payette Brewing Company Owner (and Seattle transplant) Mike Francis calls them, "formerly cool" spots like Portland and Seattle.

The numbers bear it out – the population of Boise's metropolitan statistical area (MSA) has more than doubled since 1990, compared to just over 50%

growth for the Springfield MSA.

And while that expansion has created some issues related to making sure infrastructure can keep up with the growth (*see page 11 for more*), it has not dampened the city's nice attitude or made city leaders less welcoming. Many say that has been a conscious effort, too – in large part to combat a more ominous threat from the outside: racism.

"Out of racist groups in the north came a strong determination to not be that way," says longtime community leader and philanthropist Alice Hennessey, who points to Boise's Anne Frank Human Rights Memorial as an example of that conscious effort. "Out of something really ugly came something really wonderful."

That spirit of inclusiveness also was championed by several of the largest employers with operations in Boise. For example, when Hewlett-Packard chose Boise as the location of its first expansion outside of the San Francisco area in the 1960s, they were looking for a place that valued education, families – and diversity. HP wanted to be an international company.

"They found a value proposition in diversity," says State Sen. Cherie Buckner-Webb. "But it also impacted individuals positively. It changed the demographics of Boise and Boise State University. It brought not only Americans of diverse backgrounds but also people from around the world – it changed the complexion of Boise for the positive."

And it's all been successful because leaders of all

stripes decided what they wanted their city to be and have worked to make that dream a reality. "We decided our brand before we were a brand," said Boise real estate leader Mike Ballantyne. "We said, 'this is who we are,' and we became that."

And whether it's the outdoors lifestyle, the thriving downtown scene, or even the iconic blue football field on the Boise State University campus that has become a community rallying point, it's a brand that locals, businesspeople and city leaders have all latched onto ... a brand Boise has grown into and embraced wholeheartedly.

"There's a mindset of pride about our city," says Jessica Flynn, CEO and owner of marketing firm Red Sky. "Damn it, we don't care if other cities think we're cool. We think we're cool."



# Money Follows Trust

Boise's transformation has been nothing short of remarkable ... but it was no accident. It's a story of deliberate, long-range planning with a bold vision for the future – spearheaded by strong leaders with the ability to build public support and the willingness to offer accountability.

Leaders came from both the public and private sectors. "The business community saw itself dying – people were leaving, companies were leaving – and they needed to figure out what to do," says Boise home and apartment developer Michael Brown. "Luckily, we had political leadership that bucked trends and made plans backed by research – and were able to build consensus."

The most effective way to build that consensus was to take the city's massive comprehensive land usage plan and boil it down to a handful of key points, to "make it real for people," according to Derick O'Neill, the city's planning and development services director. The key areas: redefining downtown, energizing neighborhoods, connecting all parts of the community, leveraging its land holdings and developing its transportation system.

"When you're thinking about growing business within your own place, there are things to invest in – acquiring land for parks, ways to connect neighborhoods, creating and preserving green space. People want those amenities," says City

Council President Pro Tem Lauren McLean. "There is no secret sauce - for us, it's been intentional investment in the arts, culture, neighborhoods, schools ... a place where people will want to visit, stay, come back and build jobs."

Even with those clear goals in place, getting the public on board isn't easy. "There is trust at the local level, but there's a certain sentiment that we shouldn't do big things," says Mayor Dave Bieter. "Let's not bring out the daggers and the animosity; let's shoot low. But I would advocate for continuing to shoot high and do big things. Optimism is infectious, and momentum carries over to all parts of the community."

The momentum certainly has taken hold in the downtown district. Nearly all the facilities the Springfield delegation saw downtown during the Community Leadership Visit have been built in the last three to five years – part of \$1 billion of combined public and private investment in the area over that time.

Leadership in the private sector has stepped up to lead the way in many areas. Significant business and philanthropic investments dot all sectors of the city, from long-time Boise business icons like Micron, J.R. Simplot Co., Albertson's and Hewlett Packard, and from relative newcomers in the technology and education sectors.

"We were lucky as a city in that we have the university, capital and corporate facilities all in the same place," says veteran developer Skip Oppenheimer. "It creates an unusual vibrancy and a foundation that we can build on."

Momentum has also been solidly behind the foothills levy, which uses dedicated taxpayer funds to purchase land surrounding the city to protect it from overdevelopment. There was not initial consensus behind the program – even the Boise Chamber was against its first incarnation in 2001. But city leaders were able to clear the two-thirds voter hurdle required by the Idaho Constitution to pass a new tax, and when they asked for a renewal in 2015, it received 74% approval (and, it should be noted, support from the Boise Chamber).

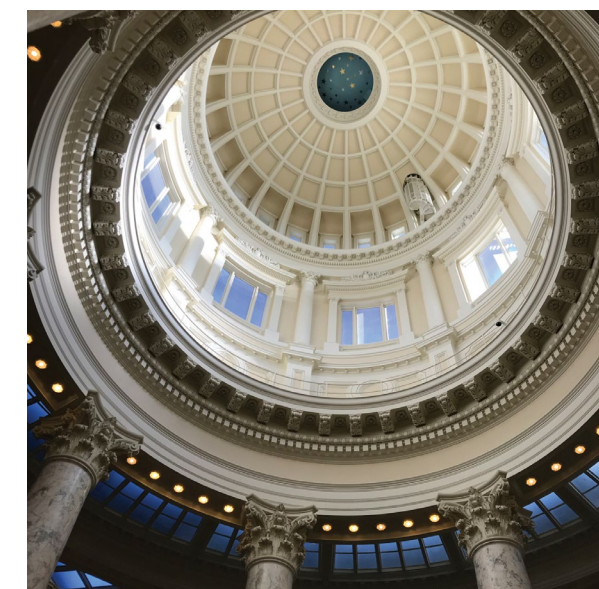
Why the continued success with such big asks from both the public and business communities? Mayor Bieter says it's a simple idea: Money follows trust.

"From business to government to education, Boise leaders have stepped forward, rallied people around their cause and followed through on their ideas. As in Springfield, leadership has been integral to their success. Continuing to foster dynamic leaders will be key to our future prosperity."

- Marshall Kinne, Med-Pay, Inc.

He says that companies and citizens will put their support behind leaders if they offer clear ideas, accountability and follow-through. "When you do your legwork and due diligence, you can responsibly take on big things."

And it's why Boise business leaders like John Hale with Atticus Holdings hold the city's current leaders in such high regard. "We've had a kickass City Council and mayor," he says. "They've promoted great ideas and won't get in the way just because they're bureaucrats."





## A Spirit of Cooperation

“Boise has said it, and I think it’s true for Springfield as well: We need to not be so in love with our history that we aren’t willing to reimagine our future.”

– Robin Robeson, Guaranty Bank

A story of growth like the one that has been happening in Boise for the last two decades doesn’t happen without a lot of groups working together.

Whether it’s collaboration between public entities and private business, veteran leaders working with the area’s young professionals and entrepreneurs, or businesses partnering with educational institutions to address today’s and tomorrow’s workforce needs,

the Treasure Valley can point to multiple examples of how the spirit of cooperation has been beneficial.

The most obvious partnership, at least at first glance, is the partnership between government and business. Public-private partnerships have been the basis of some of the most transformational developments, such as Boise Centre East or the 8th and Main project with Zion’s Bank as its cornerstone.

They’re all part of the \$1 billion in recent combined downtown investment (see page 7).

While many agree that Boise has long had a highly engaged corporate community, the key driver of the downtown developments has been the city’s Downtown Redevelopment Agency, originally created in the mid-1960s but reformed in the mid-1980s to be run jointly by city officials and private leaders.

“None of our downtown projects would have happened without the redevelopment agency,” says developer Michael Brown, who has been one of several developing condos and apartments in the city’s urban core. “Absent public participation, you’d have to wait until the entire valley was filled and traffic was so bad that people demanded to live closer. An urban condo project cannot compete if someone else can build a cheaper subdivision nearby.”

That thriving urban environment especially appeals to young professionals and entrepreneurs, many of whom are coming to the city because of its livability and atmosphere. Experienced leaders and organizations are embracing those newcomers, too, whether it’s through programs like Boise Young Professionals, run by the Boise Chamber, or a vibrant angel investor network helping promote the next wave of business ideas.

And individual businesspeople are taking the time to make connections with a new generation of leaders. “What we’ve looked at with Millennials and Gen Z is that they want to be experiential and hands-on, and that’s crucial,” says marketing professional Jessica Flynn. “Here, there isn’t a robust culture of gatekeeping – you can approach people at various levels of the organization. Multiple CEOs will get coffee with you.”

But nowhere is the cooperative spirit more on display than in education. Boise State University is in both the geographic and psychological heart of the city. Dr. Mark Rudin, the university’s vice president for research and economic development, points to the school’s computer science program as an example of collaboration in action.

In 2009, the region’s tech industry said it needed more than the 20 computer science graduates coming out of BSU each year. So the university grew the program to meet the demand: faculty was tripled

in five years, graduate numbers have increased fivefold, and the department has moved off-campus into the downtown core to be closer to the businesses where most of its students will eventually work.

“We have a very special relationship with the Boise business community,” Dr. Rudin says. “We can ask for things and get them, because we offer specific calls to action instead of general information and ‘advisory boards.’”

And when Boise State saw a need it didn’t feel prepared to fill itself, it didn’t shy away from the task. Industrial and manufacturing companies noted that there was no real community college presence in the area to train people for jobs in their industries. BSU stepped in by donating property it owned away from its main campus to create the College of Western Idaho. Formed in 2007, the school now has 20,000 students, making it one of the fastest-growing community college in the nation.

“Our entire school is literally a startup program,” says CWI President Dr. Bert Glandon, “and many of our departments are hitting it out of the park.”

It’s all part of an overall theme that has served Boise well for a long time, according to real estate developer, businessman and Boise advocate Skip Oppenheimer. “People come together around really big, good ideas,” he said. “Optimism and entrepreneurship are encouraged. And there’s something palpable about when people come together around big ideas.”



# Continuing the Momentum

So how to ensure that the bubble doesn't burst on this unique story of success?

For sure, it will be impossible to maintain this level of growth indefinitely. No city could. But it doesn't mean Boise's leaders aren't trying. First, it means, remembering and honoring their past as they grow into something new.

"We're not that cool. We're standing on the shoulders of giants," says Boise real estate leader Mike Ballantyne. "When I grew up, Boise was dying. In the 1980s, it was 'last one out, turn off the lights.' But families and leaders like the Simplots, the Morrisons, Boise Cascade's founders, those people invested in the community. We'd like to think that it's these magic ideas that we had, but we're also building on those shoulders."

Everyone tries to preserve and respect where Boise came from, and they're eager to maintain its unique

feel as it grows into a bigger city. "My biggest fear is that we become too programmed and 'pretty,'" says marketer Jessica Flynn. "If planning becomes too heavy-handed, we run the risk that the people who love it and support it won't support it anymore."

One way to keep the unique feel will be to bring in new viewpoints – and that means continuing to work to attract new people to the area.

Boise Young Professionals has worked hard in that area, with more than 1,700 members who performed more than 3,000 hours of community service in 2016 alone. "Having a sense of pride is important," says Sophie Sestero, who serves as executive chair of Boise Young Professionals. "We encourage people to be determined and ambitious. We have a no-fail mentality."

As with any other recruitment effort, though, retention is half the battle. "Recruiting diversity is

important, but retention is where everyone falls off the cliff," says Angela Taylor, executive leadership coach and Idaho native. "Boise is working hard at that. You always have to look at the culture and see if people feel like they fit in. It's not just about increasing the financial packages. Is there opportunity to grow? Do they have a voice? In the end, diversity is a fact, inclusion is a practice, and equity is a goal."

And one of the keys to retention is making people feel connected – an aspect Brown says the Boise Chamber and others have taken notice of. "It is much harder to take a job in another city when you have relationships in a community," he adds.

It's a big part of the reason Taylor herself came back to Boise after several years away from the Treasure Valley. "The more I found out about the available business support, and the access to a wide range of people, that appealed to me. What's going on in Boise allowed and encouraged my business to take off," she said. "Maybe there is something to being back in Idaho."

The challenge will be juggling growth, uniqueness and "small-town feel" with all of the issues that can accompany increased numbers of people and businesses.

For example, how do you handle the increased competition for development space for new businesses? Members of the Boise Valley Economic Partnership note that as companies talk about moving to the area, BVEP already has a protocol in place for how best to distribute those potential leads in an effort to build a spirit of collaboration instead of competition.

"And there's the non-sexy stuff – making sure your sewer lines are adequate, making sure the infrastructure is adequate," says Canyon County Commissioner Tom Dale. "Our food processing industry is strong, so making sure that we have good water available. All of that has to be addressed."

And how do you ensure that as people move from places like the West Coast to Boise to get away from long commutes and traffic jams, they don't bring the same problems with them? That's one that many people are starting to talk about – studies suggest that, if it's not addressed, the average Boise commute time could double by 2040.

"Over a decade of Community Leadership Visits, I'm struck by how many cities offer such similar takeaways: civic pride, courageous leadership, shared vision, investment in catalytic and transformative community initiatives, and a sense of inclusiveness. We can build on those here, too."

– John Wanamaker, BKD, LLP  
2017 Chairman, Springfield Area Chamber of Commerce

"It's critical that we get people on board with the transportation issue," says city planning and development services director Derick O'Neill. "Mobilizing the community is important, and we have to find a proactive way to address it."

But if we had to guess, we'd say don't bet against Boise's leaders figuring out a solution. They've figured out how to turn a giant hole in the middle of downtown into a billion dollars worth of investment, build a community college from scratch in just a few years, and get business and community leaders on board to pass taxes to buy land so it won't be developed.

It's mainly because they've never settled for "good enough." And that might be their biggest challenge for the future.

"There have been times when we lacked a sense of urgency or bias for action – if 80% of people that lived here liked it, no one had the impetus to make big changes," says Peter O'Neill, longtime Boise real estate developer and community leader. "It's much more difficult to move a community from good to great. In our wildest imagination, we couldn't have imagined 30 years ago what we have here today. But we can't get complacent."



## What now?

So with all this information to absorb, what are the real takeaways from our time in Boise? As it turns out, despite the city's unique history and circumstances, the lessons are remarkably similar to ones we've heard from other successful and thriving cities all across the country.

The city of Boise was driven by an immediate potential crisis—in this case, the lack of downtown development—combined with a desire to transform itself into something new: a hip, thriving mini-metropolis that could serve as an affordable and inviting alternative to the West Coast.

And they are making that happen by developing a cohesive, easy-to-understand vision for their city that everyone can rally behind, putting leaders in

place that propel that vision forward every day and attracting a new generation of people to the city that will build on that vision for years to come.

It's no different than what we saw in Greenville, Huntsville, Omaha, or any of the other cities we've visited in recent years. The ideas may be different from one city to the next ... embracing the outdoors, building on strengths, encouraging entrepreneurship, promoting community pride ... but the lesson is the same.

Find a vision of what the citizens want your city to be, encourage everyone to get on board, and make every decision each day with that vision in mind.

Now it's time to get to work.

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– Mayor Dave Bieter, Boise, ID

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