



Staff Profile: Meet Merriam's new city administrator

Employee Name: Chris Engel
Title: City Administrator

Department: Administration



On Aug. 8, city council voted to promote Assistant City Administrator Chris Engel to the role of city administrator. He began his new position on Sept. 1, 2016, following the retirement of Phil Lammers.

"The council has enjoyed working closely with Mr. Engel since 2013," Mayor Ken Sissom said. "He is uniquely qualified to run the city and brings a strong vision to move Merriam forward."

Prior to joining Merriam in 2013, Engel spent nearly six years as assistant to the city administrator in Prairie Village; worked 10 years in the private sector; and served four years in the United States Marine Corps.

What are the duties of a city administrator?

It's my job to synthesize the wants and desires of the city council and then create an implementation road map using available resources. The governing body is like the captain of the ship, and I'm the navigator.

Briefly describe the "state of the city" for Merriam as you step into your new role?

The state of Merriam is pretty doggone good. As a city, we've continued to make improvements to our infrastructure that have really paid off. We have a strong commercial area, and it is creating opportunities for the governing body to explore opportunities that will best benefit residents now, and down the road.

Are there any services that you would like to improve?

We are always looking for opportunities to improve how we deliver services, and improve the quality of life for residents. Our focus right now is on Parks & Rec. I'd really like to have a few more parks. We've got areas north of town that don't have parks so we can't have neighborhood "Party in your Park" events. And that's a shame. We also have facilities that are under-utilized because they no longer meet the needs of a modern community; they are old and aging and

they are falling apart. And I would really like to improve in those areas. Those are the things that help make us who we are.

Where would you like to see the state of Merriam in 10 years?

Not in a state of regret that we missed opportunities. Ten years from now I want it to be just as right as it is today. But I want to make sure that we had the conversations in the public forum to discuss and debate and deliberate over what "Just Right" means. Ten years from now I don't want to have conversations with the city council about shoulda', woulda', coulda', or say "hey, we really dropped the ball there," or "we really missed an opportunity there."

How do we capitalize on these opportunities?

Carefully. The decisions that define a community or redefine a community are big and they're difficult. Some people might use that as an excuse not to do things. I would argue that it's an excuse to do them deliberately; but to be cautious, careful and thoughtful. These decisions are impactful and they don't just affect us today, they affect us tomorrow and the next day. You constantly need to strike a balance between respecting the legacy of who you were, who you are, and who you want to be.