

**Cedar Creek**   
*Sustainable Planning Services*

302.222.9694 | [cedarcreekplanners@comcast.net](mailto:cedarcreekplanners@comcast.net)

Ms. Constance Holland, AICP  
Office of State Planning Coordination  
122 Martin Luther King Blvd. South  
Dover, Delaware 19901

Dear Connie:

This package contains the Town of Laurel's complete application for a Downtown Development District. Contents include:

- Formal application
- District plan including need and incentives
- Separate incentives document
- Comprehensive Rehabilitation and Homebuyer Proposal for DDD
- Required Census template
- One folder with required maps, including boundary shape file
- One folder with Town Council resolution and supporting letter

We also call your attention to a story map prepared for the application. It includes a flyover of the area and a series of maps that help tell the story of Laurel, its needs and challenges, and its plans.

<http://arcg.is/1UPMNs7>

We are keeping the residents of Laurel informed on the DDD and comprehensive planning processes, as well as other initiatives, via our ReimagineLaurel website, Facebook page and Twitter feed.

If you have any questions, please contact me. I am leaving June 2 for a vacation out west.

Sincerely,



Lee Ann Walling  
Principal





**DELAWARE DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT  
APPLICATION FOR DESIGNATION AS A DISTRICT**



**March 2016**

## **Downtown Development District Program How to Use this Application Form**

This application is a Microsoft Word document that has been modified. The text in the document is “locked” meaning that you can’t edit it. The fields where you are supposed to enter information are “open” allowing you to type or paste information into these fields. The fields that can be edited are in gray.

First, we recommend that you save this document with a unique file name that includes the name of your jurisdiction. An example would be “DDD-Application-Dagsboro.” Then you can work on the document without fear of overwriting it, and when you send it to us we will know who it came from (and we won’t be in danger of overwriting it).

Some of the fields are informational in nature, such as places to type in the name and address of your jurisdiction. It should be relatively straightforward to type this information in and save it. Some of the fields are check boxes, which are similarly straightforward.

Many of the fields are questions that ask you to respond in either 100 or 750 words. You might find it helpful to write and edit your responses in a separate Word document and then paste them in to the application once they are complete. The 100 word statement is to be used internally for review and in printed materials where we need a concise description of each proposed District. Almost all other questions are suggested to be no more than 750 words, which is about a page and a half of text (using 12 point font). In these responses it is important to clearly and concisely answer each question. Your District Plan can go into much more detail about each topic, and it is appropriate and expected that you will reference your District Plan in these 750 word responses. There is no penalty for exceeding 750 words, but if you find that you are writing much more than 750 words please consider putting the additional information in your District Plan.

There are numerous attachments mentioned throughout this application. The most obvious one will be the District Plan. The application also asks for various maps, spreadsheets, letters of support, resolutions and data to be attached associated with particular questions. Please compile all of the attachments into one Adobe Acrobat (.pdf) document. It would be wonderful if you could include a table of contents, and organize these attachments in the order of the questions.

It is likely that when you are done with the application form (Word document) and the attachments (.pdf document) the combination of both documents will be larger than 15mb, which is the limit for external email in the State system. In these cases, we will arrange for you to have access to a sftp file transfer site to upload your documents. Email the OMB Application Team at [OMB\\_APP\\_Team@state.de.us](mailto:OMB_APP_Team@state.de.us) to request an account and a password to upload the file. You must include the following information in your email in order for the OMB Application Team to process your account access: Name, Company, Email Address, and Phone Number.

OSPC will provide technical assistance with Census data and GIS mapping if requested by local governments that can demonstrate the need for the assistance. We will provide assistance to all local governments on the technical aspects of completing this application and transmitting / uploading finished applications. To request assistance or if you have questions about any part of this application or the program in general please contact your Circuit Rider Planner at the Office of State Planning Coordination, (302) 739-3090.



# Downtown Development Districts

## Application for Designation as a District

### Section I General Guidelines

The Downtown Development Districts Act of 2014 (the Act) was enacted by the General Assembly in order to:

- Spur private capital investment in commercial business districts and other neighborhoods;
- Stimulate job growth and improve the commercial vitality of such districts and neighborhoods;
- Help build a stable community of long term residents by improving housing opportunities; and
- Assist local governments in strengthening neighborhoods while harnessing the attraction that vibrant downtowns hold for talented people, innovative small businesses and residents from all walks of life.

Local governments<sup>1</sup> that wish to take advantage of this program must identify a downtown district in their community and apply for designation. To make an application for designation this form must be completed, supporting materials must be attached, and the entire packet submitted to the Office of State Planning Coordination as detailed herein in order for the request to be considered.

<sup>1</sup> Municipalities and counties are eligible to apply for Downtown Development District designation. Throughout this document, the terms “local government” and “applicant” refer to either the municipality or county that is presenting the application.

Completed applications will be considered by the Cabinet Committee on State Planning Issues (the Committee). The Committee will make recommendations to the Governor, who may then designate additional Downtown Development Districts in the current program year. Additional Districts may be designated in future program years. The number of Districts is limited to 15 at any one time. District designations last for 10 years, and the Committee can consider up to two five year extensions.

Selection as a Downtown Development District will entitle private construction projects within the identified District to receive grants to offset up to 20% of their capital construction costs. There are a host of other benefits that will be described in more detail in other materials. Grant funds will be administered by the Delaware State Housing Authority (DSHA).

Applications must be addressed to the Office of State Planning Coordination as follows:

Mrs. Constance C. Holland, AICP  
Director  
Office of State Planning Coordination  
122 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd, S.  
Dover, DE 19901

**Application Due Date for  
FY16 Cycle:  
June 1, 2016**



# Downtown Development Districts

## Application for Designation as a District

### Section II Specific Requirements

Local governments must identify proposed Downtown Development Districts in accordance with the Act. Districts must include a traditional mixed-use downtown area, commonly known as a Central Business District (CBD)<sup>2</sup>. Districts must be no more than 85 acres in area for jurisdictions with a population under 9,000<sup>3</sup> persons, no more than 170 acres in area for jurisdictions with a population between 9,000 and 30,000 persons, and no more than 225 acres in area for jurisdictions with a population over 30,001 persons. Applicants are encouraged to geographically concentrate the incentives to the greatest extent possible.

The size and shape of the proposed District must make sense from an urban planning and revitalization perspective. The applicant must fully describe the rationale for choosing the boundaries as a part of this application. Guidelines for preparing District boundaries are found elsewhere in this application.

A map of the District is required as a part of this application. Local governments must also supply maps showing the future land use and zoning of the district area, and discuss how the

<sup>2</sup> Central Business District: An area around the downtown portion of the city or town allowing for higher intensity residential uses as well as commercial, office, personal services, governmental, and similar uses intended to serve the community and surrounding areas of the city or town.

<sup>3</sup> Population to be based on the 2010 US Census.

plan and land use regulations support the application for the District.

The Act identifies three components of the application for designation as a District:

- The need and impact of the District designation;
- The quality of the District Plan
- The quality of the local incentives offered

Each of these components will now be described in more detail.

**Need and Impact:** The applicant must describe the need for the economic incentives that will be available in designated District. The need must be documented through the use of relevant data and other methods. The conditions of the local economy, income, poverty, homeownership rates, prevalence of vacant or abandoned buildings and other metrics may be used to make the case that the proposed District is in need of the incentives.

In addition, the applicant must describe the potential positive impacts that are likely to accrue due to designation as a District. Applicants are encouraged to describe the impacts using both data and other methods.

The **Need and Impact** section will account for 50% of the consideration given to scoring each application.

**District Plan** – The local government must present a District Plan that will be used to guide development activities and



# Downtown Development Districts

## Application for Designation as a District

revitalization efforts in the District. The District Plan is to be a detailed description of the overall strategy for the development of a proposed district.

The applicant must demonstrate that the District Plan is consistent with the local government's certified Comprehensive Plan and the *Strategies for State Policies and Spending* and any other local planning documents or studies that are applicable. Additionally, if other governmental, non-governmental and/or quasi-governmental organizations are involved with revitalization efforts in the downtown area they must be identified and it must be demonstrated that coordination of all activities will be part of the District Plan.

The District Plan should clearly and concisely describe the key actions and strategies that are in place and / or will be used to guide growth and revitalization efforts in the proposed District. The overall vision of the plan, the clarity of actions to be taken, and proof of the ability and the will of the municipality or county and other partners to implement the plan will be key considerations when evaluating this section of the application.

Changes to the District Plan must be reviewed by the Committee. District designation may be rescinded if the District Plan is not adhered to.

The quality of the **District Plan** will account for 30% of the consideration given to scoring each application.

**Local Incentives** – The local government must detail a package of local development incentives that will apply within the proposed District. These incentives may include, but are not limited to, a reduction in fees or taxes; regulatory flexibility; permit process and licensing reform; special zoning districts; or exemptions from local ordinances. These incentives may either be currently in place and in use by the municipality or county or they may be proposed for implementation upon designation as a District.

Upon designation as a District the local government is required to implement the incentive package as described and proposed for the duration of the District designation. Grant funds will not be available to projects until the incentive package is adopted by the local government and made available to the project developer. Changes to the incentive package must be approved by the Committee. The District designation may be rescinded by the Committee if these conditions are not adhered to.

The quality of the **Local Incentives** will account for 20% of the consideration given to scoring each application.

### Section III Application Instructions

Local governments that wish to be considered for designation as a Downtown Development District must fill out the application form for the current FY16 application cycle.



# *Downtown Development Districts*

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## **Application for Designation as a District**

For local governments that previously applied for designation in the FY14 round, their original applications remain on file with the OSPC. If the local government would like to be considered for designation in the FY16 round, they will have the following options:

- Have their original application reviewed;
- Have their original application reviewed with supplemental materials to be provided; or
- Complete a new application.

If a local government with an application on file wishes to be considered for designation in this round, they must signify this by completing at least the Information Sheet and they must provide a new Resolution from the local legislative body.

If a local government with an application on file wishes to provide supplemental materials, the new materials must be inserted in the appropriate locations on this application form. Attachments, such as a revised District Plan, are certainly permissible. The supplemental materials must be presented in a way that clearly demonstrates what changes, updates or new information is being provided. Actually highlighting or red –lining new materials would be most helpful.

Here are some details about the various parts of the application form:

**Check List** - self-explanatory.

**Information Sheet** - The local government must supply the

jurisdiction's name, mailing address, and phone numbers. The applicant must provide the date of the last update of the comprehensive plan and briefly describe the District being proposed. All local governments must complete this form, even those with applications on file from a previous round.

**Map of the Proposed District** – The local government must submit a map of the proposed District in sufficient detail to clearly identify the boundaries of the District and calculate its area. Maps should be created with GIS software, and the associated computer files should be made available to aid our review of the proposal. Districts must be contiguous, and be no more than 85 acres in area for local governments with a population under 9,000 persons, no more than 170 acres in area for jurisdictions with a population between 9,000 and 30,000 persons, and no more than 225 acres in area for jurisdictions with a population over 30,001 persons. There are guidelines detailed elsewhere in this application that must be followed when preparing the proposed District boundaries. Applicants must also supply maps showing the future land use and zoning of the district area, and discuss how the plan and land use regulations support the application for the District.

**Summary of Need and Impact** – The local government must complete this form to summarize the need for District designation and the potential positive impact of the district. Supporting documentation should be attached to this form.



## *Downtown Development Districts*

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### **Application for Designation as a District**

**Summary of District Plan** – The local government must complete this form to summarize the District Plan for the proposed District. Copies of the District Plan or Plans must be attached to this form, along with any relevant supporting documentation.

must have been acted upon during this FY16 application period. Resolutions from 2014 will not be accepted.

**Written Documentation from Supporting Organizations** – The local government must supply written documentation from other organizations that will be relied upon to implement the District Plan. The documentation must be attached to the “Summary of District Plan” form.

**Summary of Local Incentives** – The local government must complete this form to summarize the local incentive package to be made available within the District upon designation. The local ordinances (or other regulations or documentation) enabling and governing these incentives must be attached to this form, along with any relevant supporting documentation. In the case of incentives proposed upon designation, the draft ordinances must be attached.

**Legislative Body Resolution** – The local government must attach an adopted resolution from the jurisdiction’s legislative body that indicates the local government’s desire to apply for designation as a District, and the local government’s willingness to adhere to the District Plan and the Local Incentives for the duration of the District designation. All local governments must provide a resolution from the legislative body, even those with applications on file from a previous round. Resolutions



## *Downtown Development Districts*

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Application for Designation as a District

# Application Cover Sheet and Check List

Jurisdiction Name:

Town of Laurel

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Date of Application 5-23-16

Date Received \_\_\_\_\_

### Check List for Application Materials

- Application Cover Sheet and Check List.**
- Information Sheet.**
- Map of the Proposed District (GIS files encouraged).**
- Map of Future Land Use in Proposed District (GIS files encouraged)**
- Map of Zoning in Proposed District (GIS files encouraged)**
- Summary of Need and Impact (with attachments).**
- Summary of District Plan (with attachments).**
- Written Documentation from Supporting Organizations.**
- Summary of Local Incentives (with attachments).**
- Legislative Body Resolution.**



# Downtown Development Districts

## Application for Designation as a District

### Information Sheet

**Note: All local governments must complete this sheet, even those with applications on file from a previous round.**

Municipality / County: Laurel/Sussex

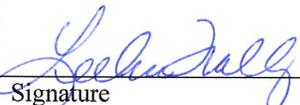
Contact Person for Application

Name: Lee Ann Walling

Address: 1 South Shore Drive Lincoln DE 19960

Phone: 302-222-9694

Email: cedarcreekplanners@comcast.net

 5/16/16  
 Signature Date

Proposed District Administrator (if different)

Name: Jamie Smith

Address: 201 Mechanic St., Laurel DE 19956

Phone: 302-875-2277

Email: laureltm@comcast.net

 5-16-16  
 Signature Date

- New Application, never applied for DDD designation before.
- Application on file, please review with no changes.
- Application on file, please review with the addition of supplemental materials included in this application form or attached.
- Application on file. Please disregard it and review this entirely new application.

Date of certified Comprehensive Plan 2011

Population of the municipality or county (as per 2010 US Census) 3708

Population of proposed District (based on 2010 US Census Block data) 352

Area of proposed District in acres 71

Area Verified by OSPC Staff \_\_\_\_\_

OSPC use only



## ***Downtown Development Districts***

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### **Application for Designation as a District**

Brief description of the proposed Downtown Development District (100 words or less)

Note: this description will be used as a summary for internal review and in printed materials

This 71-acre district includes Laurel's central business district and Broad Creek waterfront. It is a mix of commercial businesses, large Victorian homes and smaller rental properties and owner-occupied homes. Almost 40 percent of the housing stock was built in 1949 or earlier, and almost half of the properties are rentals. Most of the land along the waterfront is under the control of either the town or the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation. The district includes the area proposed for the Ramble waterfront redevelopment project and several vacant parcels zoned and ready to contribute to a rebirth in Laurel.



# *Downtown Development Districts*

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## Application for Designation as a District

### Map of the Proposed Downtown Development District

**Instructions:** Prepare a map of the proposed Downtown Development District. The map must clearly show the boundaries of the District. The area of the proposed District, in acres, must be calculated from the boundaries designated on the map. The following guidelines must be adhered to when preparing the boundaries of the proposed District:

- The maximum size of the District is 85 acres for local governments with populations below 9,000, 170 acres for local governments with a population between 9,000 and 30,000, and 225 acres for local governments with populations over 30,001 (population as per the 2010 US Census).
- Districts must be contiguous.
- Districts must include the streets and right-of-ways within it. These count towards the maximum acreage.
- Enclaves within District boundaries are not acceptable.
- Prioritizing, phasing and /or timing of redevelopment activities in different geographic areas of the District is acceptable, and will be considered favorably when it can be demonstrated that this will concentrate the incentives to achieve specific revitalization goals.
- If any portion of the proposed District is in the floodplain, the FEMA floodplain map must be included as a layer on the map. Contact OSPC for technical assistance if needed.

Attach the map of the proposed Downtown Development District

Attach a map showing the future land use in the proposed District from the municipality's or county's certified Comprehensive Plan. Attach a map showing the zoning or land use regulations that apply to lands within the District. Discuss how the plan and land use regulations support the application for the District.

It is encouraged that the map(s) be created using GIS software. If the municipality or county is able to use this software, please submit digital files to our office to supplement the application and aid us in our review. Please contact OSPC if you need assistance and / or to arrange to electronically transfer the files.

District Boundaries Map Attached

GIS data is available and will be electronically transferred to OSPC

Name of person who created the map: Lee Ann Walling

Phone 302-222-9694

Email cedarcreekplanners@comcast.net



## *Downtown Development Districts*

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### Application for Designation as a District

#### **Map of the Proposed Downtown Development District - continued**

Describe the rationale for choosing the boundaries of the proposed District (please limit your response to 750 words or less).

This area represents the historic core and downtown business district of Laurel, as well as the Broad Creek waterfront. It is a mix of multi-use Town Center zoning, more protective Marine Resources zoning along the Broad Creek waterfront, and medium-density residential zoning,

Laurel already has undergone significant redevelopment within this area because of the mission and foresight of the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation and the Town, both of which control a critical mass of property along the waterfront. The LRC has acquired and, in some cases where appropriate, demolished blighted properties in this area. Abandoned industrial sites have given way to landscaped parks and upscale villas, as well as new office space and Abbots on Broad Creek, a restaurant leased by the LRC.

The area also includes the parcels slated for redevelopment as part of the Ramble, a mixed-use project focused on bringing jobs and people to downtown Laurel in a setting that is sensitive to its context on Broad Creek and its floodplain. The Ramble is the product of extensive public engagement.

The central business district along Market Street includes a mix of successful and struggling businesses, the Public Library and two banks, and buildings that would benefit from façade improvements. Storefront churches and businesses that do not maintain regular hours impair the walkability and "browseability" of the downtown.

Along Market Street and, especially, Central Avenue, are larger older homes, including Victorian-style. Some of these homes are vacant and some are in various stages of disrepair. The residential area south of Market Street to Sixth Street includes a 50-50 mix of smaller, rental and owner-occupied homes. This residential area is bounded by the railroad track on the west and Pine Street on the east.

The western boundary of the DDD is the railroad track, except for a small parcel at the entrance to Roger C. Fisher Laurel River Park. Laurel and the LRC would like to improve access to and the sense of safety within this park, which is beautiful but somewhat secluded. The park includes a playground and a DNREC boat ramp. It is important for the community that the Ramble is successfully linked to Roger C. Fisher Park and the western side of town.

The northern boundary is the northern edge of the Ramble project. The westernmost parcel includes a town pump station and a newly installed kayak launch; the parcel immediately north is not in town. The Ramble's planned nature-based playground is also included, as well as a parcel immediately east of Central Avenue that the LRC plans to acquire and clean up (it is the site of a



## *Downtown Development Districts*

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### **Application for Designation as a District**

former town dump). Also on the north side of Broad Creek is the LRC-owned property that includes Abbots on Broad Creek.

South of Broad Creek, from west to east, the DDD includes the LRC-owned parcels targeted for a pocket neighborhood of cottages as part of the Ramble, vacant properties the LRC owns or would like to acquire, and Laureltown, the commercial office complex along Front Street. It also includes Johnny Janosik Park along Cooper Street.

Attach a map showing the future land use of the District from the local government's certified Comprehensive Plan.

Map Attached

GIS data is available and will be electronically transferred to OSCP

Attach a map showing the zoning or land use regulations that apply to lands within the District

Map Attached

GIS data is available and will be electronically transferred to OSPC



## *Downtown Development Districts*

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### Application for Designation as a District

#### **Map of the Proposed Downtown Development District - continued**

Discuss how the plan and land use regulations support the application for the District (Please limit your response to 750 words or less).

While Laurel has a certified comprehensive plan that is only 5 years old, the Town made the decision to undergo a full update in conjunction with its Downtown Development District application. The District Plan submitted with the DDD application will be a stand-alone element of the new comprehensive plan. In 2015, the Town applied for and received Neighborhood Building Blocks funding to develop a comprehensive plan in close association with its DDD application.

The current plan has been difficult to implement because implementation action items are prolific and scattered throughout the document. The goal of the new comprehensive plan is a more focused document with objectives and action items that are easier to implement and track. The new plan also will reflect the significant changes that have occurred within the Town since the current plan was certified.

It is not anticipated that there will be major zoning changes associated with the updated plan. A review of current zoning classifications indicates that, with a few adjustments, Laurel's zoning code will complement the redevelopment of the DDD. Most notably, the core of the DDD is already zoned Town Center, which allows for mixed residential and commercial land uses and is intended to promote walkability. The T-C district, according to the town's code, "is utilized for an intensive and traditional mixture of small-scale retail, cultural, conference and meeting, lodging, business, personal service, financial, institutional, office, residential and governmental uses."

The T-C district includes the commercial district along Market Street, as well as the Old Town neighborhood of smaller homes and businesses directly south of the proposed Ramble. Some adjustment of permitted uses within T-C will be proposed to ensure that the zone is aligned with the goals of the DDD.

The parcels fronting Broad Creek are zoned Marine Resources Use (M-R), a unique category designed to protect the character, viewshed and water quality of Broad Creek. The entire Ramble project is located within this zone. One of the purposes of M-R, according to the code, is "to recognize the sensitivity of the unique waterfront environment in this area and reinforce appropriate safeguards to protect the area from periodic flooding, soil erosion, sedimentation and slope failure due to unregulated construction, removal of vegetation, dredging, filling, damming or channelization." Some of the permitted uses within the M-R zone appear to be at odds with the stated purpose of the district, and it would be useful to more closely align purpose and uses.

The residential area south of Market Street is zoned R-2, which allows for smaller detached and semi-detached residences on a minimum 4,000-square-foot lot. That zoning is appropriate for the



## *Downtown Development Districts*

### **Application for Designation as a District**

DDD.

The current plan has a significant discussion of tree canopy, which is important to both the character of the town and to water quality. The new plan also will include tree canopy goals.

Also, while the current plan goes into extensive detail about the town's history, the plan lacks specific, focused recommendations about Laurel's large historic district, which includes almost 800 properties. Except for The Ramble area, the DDD lies completely within the historic district. It is time to re-evaluate both the size of the district, what should be included, and what inclusion means for the town, the properties and their owners.

The plan will need to balance development outside the DDD, especially along the town's US 13 corridor, with the goals and objectives inside the DDD. If well planned, the two areas can co-exist and improve Laurel's economic viability. The Town's wastewater treatment plant can accommodate a great deal of growth beyond Laurel's downtown and, indeed, the Town's leaders desire this growth.

Public engagement with the comprehensive plan began in April. Council approval is expected by the end of 2016.

Are there other special overlays, districts, or areas that intersect the proposed District? Examples of such special areas include historic districts, BID taxing districts, etc. Please describe any of these special areas and how they will interact with the proposed Downtown Development District. Include maps, if applicable. (Please limit your response to 750 words or less).

All of the DDD, except for the parcels immediately alongside Broad Creek, are included within Laurel's Historic District. The historic district already contains more structures (about 800) than any in the state, and some historic preservation interests want to enlarge it; this will be discussed along with the Comprehensive Plan update. It seems more likely that the district will be "right-sized" so that being in it can effectively mean something to the property owner, the town, and the cause of historic preservation in Delaware. At any rate, the DDD is likely to remain within Laurel's historic district even if the historic district's boundaries are altered.

The DDD also includes the area of The Ramble green redevelopment project along Broad Creek. While not an official district, The Ramble is driving significant interest in Laurel's core - from a nature/heritage assessment for the community, to multiple environmental assessments along Broad Creek, to a branding effort, and to the DDD application itself. With the DDD designation, the Town and LRC hope to attract a developer for the pocket neighborhood, a brewpub or similar



## *Downtown Development Districts*

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### **Application for Designation as a District**

establishment, an outfitter geared toward kayaking, birding, biking and hiking, and similar related businesses.



## *Downtown Development Districts*

### Application for Designation as a District

### Summary of Need and Impact 50%

**Instructions:** Complete this form to document the need for the District designation and its potential to positively impact your community. Attachments of data and other documentation are required. There is no specific page or word limit on the information that can be attached, *however* please be aware that applications that provide clear and concise documentation that is directly related to the need and impact of the District proposal will be scored the highest.

Please describe the **need for** the Downtown Development District designation in your community (please limit your response to 750 words or less).

Laurel has the lowest Median Household Income of any municipality in Delaware, according to the U.S. Census' 2010-2014 American Community Survey. Despite its very attractive waterfront and the redevelopment activities along it, the overall economy remains somewhat stagnant. Sandwiched between Seaford and Salisbury, the town is not experiencing retail growth along its U.S. 13 corridor.

Only three residential dwellings have been built in Laurel over the past three years - a Habitat house and two rental units. Like most small towns in Delaware and elsewhere, a once thriving downtown where locals gathered and shopped is just a memory for older residents.

As a symptom of downtown malaise, recent market data demonstrates that the second largest income generator within the municipality is alcohol sales, representing more than 12% of the town's total annual economic impact.

The town struggles with vacant homes, among them some of Laurel's Victorian gems, as residents grow too old to care for them and move away. Almost half of the residential properties within the proposed DDD are rental units, and many are owned by absentee landlords who are difficult to hold accountable.

The town also can't take on any more debt to make needed capital improvements. A loan for a \$1.6 million stormwater retrofit and environmental improvement project within the proposed DDD was forgiven by DNREC's Financial Assistance Branch so the project would meet affordability requirements.

While this paints a rather dismal picture of the town's fortunes, Laurel has taken significant steps forward in recent years. Since its inception in 1992, the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation has acquired 30 properties along Broad Creek and the downtown; built and managed new



## *Downtown Development Districts*

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### **Application for Designation as a District**

commercial space; constructed upscale villas after purchasing and clearing an old industrial site; established public parks; and stabilized the Broad Creek shoreline. Their work has made it feasible to envision and design The Ramble, a mixed-use project on either side of Broad Creek; it will include a pocket cottage neighborhood, village shops, a network of trails, a nature-based playground and a wetlands education area. The LRC intends to acquire more properties to make the Ramble a reality.

The town recently adopted the branding recommendations of Arnett, Muldrow and Associates. "Laurel: Great Things Come Naturally" reflects the town's setting along Broad Creek and its intention to become a launching point for nature and heritage tourism throughout the Nanticoke region.

If Laurel were just a collection of gloomy statistics, there would be no hope and no rationale for seeking a Downtown Development District designation. However, Laurel does have hope, a sense of its future and definitive plans to realize that future. It is a cohesive community with citizens actively committed to making Laurel a livable destination for new residents, employees in new jobs, and visitors. With the LRC, it has a track record of revitalization and consistent economic accomplishment. The DDD designation would be the catalyst to complete Laurel's transformation.



## *Downtown Development Districts*

### Application for Designation as a District

## Summary of Need and Impact – continued 50%

Attach relevant data to that demonstrates and documents the **need** for the Downtown Development District designation.

The following table summarizes the **required** data from the US Census. Input the data into the summary spreadsheet provided, and attach any other written documentation that can summarize the data. Contact OSPC for assistance with the Census data, if needed.

Required Data from the US Census

<b>The municipality or county as a whole</b>			
Median Income	Poverty Rate	Age of Structures	% Homeownership
% Rental	Vacancy	Median Home Value	
<b>The Census Tract(s) that contains the proposed District</b>			
Median Income	Poverty Rate	Age of Structures	% Homeownership
% Rental	Vacancy	Median Home Value	% Low / Mod Income
<b>The Census Block(s) that most closely correspond to the proposed District</b>			
Total Population	% Homeownership	% Vacancy	

Summary spreadsheet and other documentation attached

Please provide any other data that support the municipality’s application for the District. The following table contains some **suggested** data sources that can serve to supplement the required data. Please attach any that apply, and any other data that is relevant. Cite the source for each dataset.

Suggested Data from a Variety of Sources

Blight	Condemned Properties	Code Violations
Crime Statistics	Economic Analysis	CDBG Program Statistics
Market Studies	Redevelopment Authority Activities	Public Works Projects
Education Data	Infrastructure Condition or Need	Other

Additional data and documentation attached



## *Downtown Development Districts*

### Application for Designation as a District

## Summary of Need and Impact – continued 50%

Describe how the attached data demonstrates the **need for the** Downtown Development District designation in your community (please limit your response to 750 words or less).

On the ground in Laurel and reviewing the town's Census data, the need is evident – and acute. At \$33,387, Laurel's median household income is 55 percent of Delaware's (\$60,231) and 62 percent of Sussex County's (\$55,305).

Laurel has a poverty rate of 25 percent, and 43 percent of its residents receive food stamps. Almost half of the residents (49.1 percent) are paying more than 30 percent of their income on housing and related costs – an indication that that they are struggling to make ends meet.

The median home value in the town is \$131,300 vs. \$231,400 for Sussex County and \$232,900 for Delaware.

Almost 40 percent of the housing stock was built in 1949 or earlier; in fact, one third dates to 1939 or earlier. In Sussex County at large, only 7.5 percent of housing dates to 1949 or earlier. About 44 percent of the dwellings in town are rentals, and an estimated 21 percent of the housing units within the proposed DDD are considered vacant.

The town, despite an aggressive inspection and enforcement program especially with regard to rental properties, has difficulty dealing with the large number of absentee landlords – many of whom bought properties on line and have never set foot in Delaware, let alone Laurel.

Demographics. Laurel, according to Census data, has a minority white population. Whites make up 44 percent of the town's population, and African-Americans comprise 44 percent. The Hispanic population is estimated at 11 percent.

Laurel also has a surprisingly young population. According to the 2010-2014 American Community Survey (U.S. Census), the median age in Laurel is only 27.7 years, compared to 46.5 for Sussex County and 39.1 for Delaware. The largest single age cohort in Laurel is 0 to 5, at 14.5 percent. Only 8.5 percent of Laurel's population is 65 or older, compared to 15.4 percent for Sussex County and 22.5 percent for Delaware.

Many homes, including some of the large Victorian homes that front Laurel's main streets, are in disrepair. A few are abandoned, as their aging occupant lost control over maintenance and moved out. The town's building and inspections department conducted an assessment of building conditions within the proposed DDD and rated the structures on a scale of 1 to 5; the results are



## *Downtown Development Districts*

### **Application for Designation as a District**

included in the DDD story map. There are 10 vacant homes within the DDD.

Code violations. The town pulled a report of code violations for the period April 1, 2013 through April 11, 2016. The software the town uses does not enable further breakdown or mapping of the violations, but the breakdown for that period is:

- Housing violation notice – 947
- Code violations – 137
- Mow property – 994
- Unlicensed rental – 221
- Vehicle expired (no tag) – 175
- Tow vehicle - 15

The violations relate to either the 2012 ICC International Property Maintenance Code (IPMC) or the town's own code. Laurel's chief building inspector estimates that about 25 percent of these violations occurred within the proposed DDD. The town maintains an aggressive posture toward enforcement, especially of rental properties.

Building activity. There were only three new residences constructed in Laurel between from January 2013 through March 2016; one was built by Sussex County Habitat for Humanity, and two were rental units. A second Habitat house is currently under construction.

A review of permits issued for the town and the specific DDD area during that period show minimal activity. The largest projects over the last three years are the fitout of a new renal dialysis facility on US 13, the planned demolition of the old Laurel Central Middle School and the construction of a new Family Dollar store (all outside the DDD area). Most of the projects were window and roof replacements, installation of solar panels, and other repairs and minor additions.

Crime. The Laurel Police Department pulled crime statistics for the proposed DDD area over the period from January 1, 2013 through April 24, 2016. They indicate a fairly high level of criminal activity in this 71-acre area (see story map):

- Crimes against persons (121). Includes domestic offenses (55), intimidation (10), aggravated assault (4), rape (2), robbery at gunpoint (3), robbery at knifepoint (1), simple assault (25) and stalking (1).
- Crimes against property (129). Includes burglary, embezzlement, fraud, larceny, vandalism, motor vehicle theft and trespassing.
- Crimes against society (54). Includes drug violations (29), disorderly conduct (16), drunkenness, intimidation, liquor law violations and weapons offenses (5).



## *Downtown Development Districts*

### **Application for Designation as a District**

Describe the potential positive impacts of the proposed Downtown Development District designation in your community. Impacts can include economic, social and / or cultural impacts among others. Attach supporting documentation if applicable (please limit your response to 750 words or less).

A Downtown Development District designation would reduce risk and improve the attraction for redevelopment in Laurel's core. It doesn't necessarily mean that new investors would suddenly flock to Laurel. In spite of the long-term investment in the area by the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation and the town's efforts to address substandard rental properties, the area is still blighted, and The Ramble parcels still have an industrial feel. Amenities such as the planned trail network need to be installed, some demolition needs to occur, and contaminated sites need to be cleaned up.

But given the relatively small size of the area, the excitement about The Ramble's progress, and the incentives that will be available within the DDD, the designation would definitely create momentum for the type of transformational investment that could change Laurel's destiny and attract residents, jobs and visitors to the town. The comprehensive plan could help embed this transformation in the town's future.

The positive impacts would apply not to just commercial development but to the quality of life for residents as deteriorating properties are rehabilitated, new businesses and services take root, and amenities such as walking trails linking sections of town help bring the community together.

The area of The Ramble already is regularly used as a site for community activities: the Fourth of July celebration, the annual Bike and Brew bicycle tour, last year's Fall Ramble, and an upcoming paddling festival. Such site activation is the prerequisite for attracting businesses and people to downtown Laurel on a more permanent basis.

The town's decision to focus on nature and heritage tourism as an economic development strategy will complement the DDD designation, creating more opportunities for visitors and related businesses in the downtown area. Nature and heritage tourists are low-impact visitors and tend to have higher disposable income, according to tourism studies.

From an environmental standpoint, The Ramble is planned to avoid the floodplain and incorporate low-impact development practices that will reduce nutrient loads into Broad Creek - which flows into the Nanticoke River and ultimately the Chesapeake Bay. Also, a DDD designation would enable the planned rehabilitation and home ownership program to tap into Energize Delaware incentives for energy efficiency.

That rehabilitation and community improvement program will be available to all residents within the DDD. The town leadership and the LRC are committed to capitalizing on the DDD



## ***Downtown Development Districts***

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### **Application for Designation as a District**

designation to improve Laurel's livability over the long term.



# Downtown Development Districts

## Application for Designation as a District

### Summary of District Plan 30%

**Instructions:** through this application the municipality or county will be presenting the District Plan that will guide future revitalization, growth and development activities in the District. Upon designation, the local government will be required to adhere to the District Plan in order to qualify for grants and other incentives. Attach the District Plan, and summarize the content, goals, and objectives in the space provided.

The District Plan Checklist is provided in the Program Guidelines document. The proposed District Plan must be prepared in accordance with the Checklist.

Attach the District Plan.

District Plan Attached.

Summarize the content, goals and objectives of the District Plan. (please limit your response to 750 words or less).

The plan for the 71-acre Downtown Development District will be included as an element of Laurel’s Comprehensive Plan update this year. The district plan’s overall vision is to enhance the commercial viability, walkability and livability of Laurel’s core. The following key priorities will help Laurel achieve that vision:

1. Ensure that zoning and permitted land uses, as well as design standards, further the vision of a commercially viable, walkable and livable town core;
2. Bring The Ramble waterfront redevelopment initiative to life and attract businesses that will further Laurel’s goals for sustainable economic development;
3. Improve the condition of both owner-occupied and rental housing and encourage home ownership; and
4. Ensure that the town’s key natural asset, Broad Creek, is protected from pollution, erosion and uses that devalue it.

Each of these priorities has several supporting objectives. While they are detailed, there is a public engagement process associated with the update of Laurel’s comprehensive plan. Since public work on the plan just began in April, this district plan will get as specific as possible while still allowing room for further public input. That includes members of council, as three of Laurel’s four council wards overlap the proposed DDD.

Under Category 1, there are several objectives discussed in the district plan. Laurel has relatively flexible, mixed-use zoning within the proposed DDD. There is no need to create a special



## *Downtown Development Districts*

### **Application for Designation as a District**

overlay or significantly revamp the code, but there should be a review of permitted uses within the DDD to ensure that the current code does not create barriers to implementing the district plan and that uses within the DDD are appropriate.

Other short-term objectives under Category 1 include design and landscaping standards, including a pattern book, for The Ramble and Market Street commercial area; pursuing a façade improvement program for Market Street commercial properties; promoting walkability through treatments for vacant storefronts and requiring regular business hours within the DDD; developing requirements and processes for the core of Laurel’s Historic District, especially Market Street and Central Avenue; and rezoning part of the commercial property just north of the Central Avenue bridge from commercial to Marine Resources.

Under Category 2, the Town and Laurel Redevelopment Corporation will take steps to ensure that The Ramble vision comes to life. The LRC will acquire 2-3 strategic parcels that are part of The Ramble plan and use brownfield program funds to remediate them. The Town/LRC will attract a quality developer for the planned pocket neighborhood of cottages on Broad Creek, and attract signature commercial enterprises that further Laurel’s nature and heritage tourism objectives; continue to activate The Ramble site for events and festivals; secure funding for the planned trail network, nature-based playground and green infrastructure installations; and work with DelDOT to ensure appropriate redesign of bridges across Broad Creek.

Under Category 3, the Town and LRC will move forward with a comprehensive home rehabilitation and homebuyer program within the DDD, including addressing vacant properties to stabilize the neighborhood. The “no-wrong-door” program will guide residents to funding sources such as USDA Rural Development, Sussex County Habitat for Humanity, state and federal historic tax credits and other available programs. The LRC has agreed to fund a position that will develop the program, create partnerships with the federal, state and nonprofit partners, create marketing materials and a web portal, and conduct initial outreach before handing off the program to the town.

Under Category 4, the Town and LRC will implement the recommendations of the report, “From Broad Creek to the Chesapeake: Guidance for Growth in Laurel that Protects Our Water Quality.” That report contains eight pages of recommendations, many of which pertain to The Ramble and DDD area. The town and LRC will ensure that the recommended green infrastructure practices are installed as The Ramble develops. The cottages will be built to superior design standards and have a “net-zero” impact on water quality in Broad Creek. Tree canopy goals will be established in the comprehensive plan update. All new development will avoid the 100-year floodplain.



## ***Downtown Development Districts***

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### **Application for Designation as a District**

### **Summary of District Plan – continued 30%**

Please summarize how the local government envisions itself in a leadership role to guide the successful implementation of the District Plan (please limit your response to 750 words or less).

Laurel's Mayor, Town Manager and Town Council have reviewed the District Plan and a proposed timeline for implementing the plan and the incentives. On May 16, the Council passed a resolution supporting the Downtown Development District application and framework. Council also finds the action timeline included in the District Plan to be reasonable.

The Town's leadership has discussed and believes it has the capacity to implement the district plan. The consultant preparing the DDD application and comprehensive plan also will be developing the proposed community improvement program and will be available into 2017 to provide implementation assistance, including drafting of ordinances.

A high-level staff person has been identified to manage the community improvement/housing rehabilitation program once developed. Officials involved in the town's budget also are considering the creation of a position to shepherd plans and activities related to the DDD and economic development.

The Laurel Redevelopment Corporation will be pursuing land acquisition and site cleanup. The LRC retained Dr. Jules Bruck to continue with The Ramble site design. A paid UD intern working under Dr. Bruck and the consultant will develop design and landscaping standards for the DDD, including a pattern book.

Also, UD's Sustainable Coastal Communities Initiative and Delaware Sea Grant remain committed to providing continuing leadership on projects and activities that support Laurel's community redevelopment efforts.

Finally, the Town Manager and council are involved in and committed to the update of Laurel's Comprehensive Plan, which will continue throughout the summer and fall. The Council appointed a Plan Advisory Team to provide feedback and input into the plan. Monthly public meetings are scheduled, as is a community-wide survey in June-July.

List key implementation strategies for the District Plan. Please also list any known projects or proposals that can be underway within six to



## *Downtown Development Districts*

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### **Application for Designation as a District**

twelve months of District designation. Key Priority Projects<sup>4</sup> should be identified, if applicable. See the Checklist for more details (please limit your response to 750 words or less).

There are several projects that are considered key to the success of Laurel's Downtown Development District:

1. The acquisition and cleanup of at least three strategic parcels that are within The Ramble footprint. The Laurel Redevelopment Corporation has met with NCALL to discuss a sizable line of credit; also, a Bond Bill request has been made for land acquisition. (6 months)
2. The installation of The Ramble trail network and connection to Roger Fisher Park. This network is viewed as a significant amenity and a prerequisite for development (especially residential development) of The Ramble. (24 months)
3. The development of landscaping, design and architectural standards, including a pattern book, for The Ramble and Market Street commercial area. This initiative is needed to guide new development and rehabilitation within the DDD and would include existing commercial facades. (6 months)
4. The creation of a Community Improvement Program aimed at both rental and owner-occupied housing rehabilitation as well as neighborhood stabilization through the acquisition of vacant homes. (6 months)
5. The solicitation of development proposals for The Cottages at Laurel Mills, the residential component of The Ramble (9-12 months)
6. Attraction of signature commercial enterprises that further the town's nature and heritage tourism objectives - such as a brewpub or multi-sport outfitters. (Continuous)

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<sup>4</sup> Key Priority Projects are specific projects identified in the District Plan that are considered to be potential catalysts for other redevelopment activity and / or contribute to superior urban design or other benefits to the District.



## ***Downtown Development Districts***

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### **Application for Designation as a District**

### **Summary of District Plan – continued 30%**

List any other governmental, quasi-governmental or non-governmental organizations that will be involved in the creation and / or implementation of the District Plan. A Main Street organization would be an example of such an organization. For each organization, describe how the local government will coordinate their activities to encourage revitalization and economic development in the District.

The Laurel Redevelopment Corporation (LRC) is the most significant partner. The LRC has a history of redevelopment in Laurel, including along the Broad Creek waterfront, owns critical parcels within the DDD, intends to secure additional parcels, and is prepared to offer a minimum discount to developers of those parcels. The LRC also has agreed to fund the development, marketing and initial outreach of the planned comprehensive community improvement program. The LRC also will play a key role in attracting appropriate development to the DDD. The LRC's letter of support is attached.

USDA Rural Development will be a partner in the funding of housing rehabilitation within the DDD, along with Sussex County Habitat for Humanity. Their letters of support are included.

NCALL will provide a line of credit to the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation for land acquisition and commercial property rehabilitation, along with mini-permanent loans. NCALL's letter of support is attached.

Laurel Historical Society will help identify properties that could take advantage of historic tax credits and in the planned review of the town's Historic District.

The Laurel Chamber of Commerce provides outreach to businesses and will help communicate with and engage those businesses as the DDD plan is implemented. The chamber's letter of support is attached.

The Laurel Ministerial Association supports the DDD application for its job creation and housing rehabilitation goals; it will be a partner in spreading information throughout the community.

Attach written documentation (in the form of letters of agreement, memorandums of understanding, board resolutions etc) from each of the above listed organizations indicating support for this application to be



## ***Downtown Development Districts***

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### **Application for Designation as a District**

designated as a Downtown Development District and identifying a willingness to coordinate with the municipal government to implement the District Plan.

Written documentation attached from all other organizations



## *Downtown Development Districts*

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### Application for Designation as a District

### Summary of District Plan – continued

### 30%

Describe any actions your local government has taken to ensure energy efficient and environmentally sensitive development, and to prepare for flooding and sea level rise, if applicable. How will these efforts be implemented in the proposed District? (please limit your response to 750 words or less).

The Ramble redevelopment project was designed with water quality and flooding issues in mind. It embodies the principles of ecological design, including low-impact development practices such as green parking strategies, rain barrels, green infrastructure; protecting soils from erosion and amending them if necessary to provide favorable conditions for trees; planting native trees and deploying best management practices for landscape maintenance; conserving public open space and reclaiming brownfield properties; and planning for integration of wildlife into the landscape.

A feasibility study on green stormwater infrastructure for The Ramble prepared by ForeSite Associates considered the floodplain and sea level rise scenarios when recommending appropriate stormwater practices. The recommendations include innovative best management practices such as constructed wetlands and a living shoreline.

The DDD plan calls for the cottages within The Ramble to be models of sustainable development with a net-zero effect on water quality. The plan also wants to ensure that the Marine Resources zoning district, which includes The Ramble, does not allow uses that negatively affect water quality.

The town recently received a report, "From Broad Creek to the Chesapeake: Guidance for Growth in Laurel that Protects Our Water Quality." The report was prepared for the University of Delaware's Sustainable Coastal Communities Initiative with federal Chesapeake Program funding and includes eight pages of recommendations that guide the town toward meeting federal water quality (TMDL) standards.

The town has received \$1.6 million in funding from DNREC's Financial Assistance Branch that will eliminate combined sewer overflows (CSO's) within the proposed DDD and will measurably remove nutrients from the watershed.

Laurel has a wastewater treatment plant that already treats to Chesapeake standards for nitrogen and phosphorous with Enhanced Nutrient Removal (ENR) technology. The plant is operating at about half its permitted capacity. With a USDA Rural Development grant, it is extending sewer



## *Downtown Development Districts*

### **Application for Designation as a District**

service to many businesses along US 13 - eliminating the equivalent of 138 septic systems.

If Laurel receives a Downtown Development District designation, Energize Delaware's energy-efficiency rebate program will become a part of the proposed Community Improvement (Rehab) Program.

Describe how the District Plan is consistent with your certified Comprehensive Plan and the *Strategies for State Policies and Spending* (please limit your response to 750 words or less).

<http://stateplanning.delaware.gov/strategies/>

The Downtown Development District Plan is thoroughly compatible with the 2015 Strategies for State Policies and Spending. As shown in the District Plan, the area is almost all Level 1, a mixed-use and denser development area within a municipality.

Riparian areas on either side of Broad Creek are mapped as either Level 2 or Out of Play. All of the recommendations within this plan will correspond with the state's investment strategies for Level 1 while protecting the riparian corridors and parkland that is mapped as Level 2.

The Town received Neighborhood Building Blocks funding to update its comprehensive plan in conjunction with the preparation of a Downtown Development District application. The public engagement process began in March and will continue throughout most of 2016. The District Plan will be an embedded element of the new Comprehensive Plan.

While there is no portion of the current Comprehensive Plan in conflict with the District Plan, the current plan is obsolete considering new direction within the town, such as The Ramble redevelopment and focus on nature/heritage tourism. Also, the plan included hundreds of bullet points relating to implementation scattered throughout the document. Implementation needs to be much more focused, reasonable, and measurable. With that in mind, the Town plans to closely align the DDD plan with its new Comprehensive Plan.



## *Downtown Development Districts*

### Application for Designation as a District

### Summary of Local Incentives 20%

**Instructions:** The municipality or county must complete this form to summarize the local incentive package to be made available within the District upon designation. The local ordinances (or other regulations or documentation) enabling and governing these incentives must be attached to this form, along with any relevant supporting documentation. In the case of incentives proposed upon designation, the draft ordinances must be attached.

Attach the Local Incentives. The following table includes **suggested** local incentives. Please attach any that are relevant, and others that have not been listed.

Suggested Local Incentives

Fee or Tax Reductions	Regulatory Flexibility	Permit or Licensing Reform
Special Zoning Districts	Exemptions from Local Ordinances	Streamlined Permitting
Other		

Written documentation attached for all Local Incentives

List the Local Incentives that are already in place. Please detail the geographic extent of each incentive (i.e. is the incentive available throughout the entire jurisdiction, or only in certain geographic areas?)

Local Incentive	In effect since (approx.)	Geographic area covered
First-time homebuyer waiver of realty transfer tax (town portion)	2000	Town





## *Downtown Development Districts*

### Application for Designation as a District

design and implement the community improvement program	designation	
Free lot (town-owned) at Market and Oak Streets	Within 60 days of DDD designation	DDD Only
Tourism marketing/social media training for DDD businesses	Early 2017	DDD Only
Purchase and remediation of strategic parcels within DDD (Ramble footprint)	Ongoing after DDD designation	DDD Only
Installation of trail network, nature-based playground and low-impact stormwater practices within Ramble as an amenity for residential and commercial development	Ongoing after DDD designation	DDD Only
		DDD Only

### Summary of Local Incentives - continued 20%

Please describe how each local incentive will be funded. If the incentive involves a reduction or waiver of taxes or fees, or in-kind services (for example, expedited permitting utilizing existing staff resources) please note that here.

Local Incentive	Funding Source
Graduated reduction in sewer and water impact fees	Partial waiver of these fees by town
No town property taxes on improvements for five years after CO is issued	Town Council action
Minimum markdown of 25% off appraised value of LRC properties	LRC Board approval - done
Project PopUp - three months' free rent for selected commercial properties	LRC Board and DEDO approval
Comprehensive Community Improvement Program - focus on rehabilitation and home ownership (see detailed proposal)	Funded through coordination of existing sources such as USDA Rural Development, Sussex County Habitat for Humanity, DSHA, federal and state historic tax credits, town waiver of realty transfer tax for first-time homebuyers,



## *Downtown Development Districts*

### Application for Designation as a District

	Energize Delaware
One-time funding of position to design and implement the community improvement program (see detailed proposal)	Laurel Redevelopment Corporation
Free lot (town-owned) at Market and Oak Streets	Town Council action
Tourism marketing/social media training for DDD businesses	LRC
Purchase and remediation of strategic parcels within DDD (Ramble footprint)	Bond Bill and/or NCALL "mini-permanent" loan plus state Hazardous Substance Cleanup Act (HSCA) funds
Installation of trail network, nature-based playground and low-impact stormwater practices within Ramble as an amenity for residential and commercial development	The LRC and its consultants have prepared conceptual site work and budget pricing for labor, equipment and materials to complete the entire scope of work; no funding has been sought yet

For each Local Incentive to be provided, please describe the specifics of how the incentive works (details are needed), and how the incentive encourages economic development and revitalization in your community.

- Community improvement and rehabilitation program. This will be a targeted, “no-wrong-door” effort to rehabilitate homes of all sizes and incomes and promote home ownership within the DDD and also acquire and fix up vacant properties. It includes coordination with USDA Rural Development, Sussex County Habitat for Humanity, DSHA, NCALL, Division of Historic and Cultural Affairs and other nonprofits to fund rehabilitation of owner-occupied and rental properties. This program will be supported by the town, LRC and assorted funders and nonprofits and will be administered by the town once it is launched.
- Coordinator for the above program. This program involves loans and grants from many different sources, with different qualifying incomes. This position would develop, coordinate and market the program and conduct initial outreach while seeking additional grants and partnerships. The program will then be handed off to the town, which has identified a high-level employee to administer it. The Laurel Redevelopment Corporation will support a position up to \$13,000.
- Graduated sewer and water impact fee reductions. Water and sewer impact fees amount to \$7,000 per equivalent dwelling unit (EDU). The town has agreed to offer a graduated reduction schedule: 1 to 3 EDUs – 40% reduction; 4 to 7 EDUs – 50% reduction; 8 or more EDUs – 60% reduction.
- Property tax abatement on improvements. The town has agreed to waive the property tax



## *Downtown Development Districts*

### **Application for Designation as a District**

increase that would result from improvements for a period of five-years from the date of Certificate of Occupancy (no phase-in). This means that a new development such as the cottages or a brewpub would pay taxes only on the unimproved land (which was discounted by LRC).

- Discounted land/leases on parcels owned by Laurel Redevelopment Corporation. The LRC board has voted to apply a minimum discount of 25 percent to appraised value of land it owns along the Broad Creek waterfront. The discount will be one of several measures to attract development to The Ramble area and reduce the risk of redevelopment.
- Purchase and cleanup of key strategic sites within The Ramble footprint. The LRC has identified at least two sites (one a certified brownfield, the other a former town dump underneath wetlands) that it intends to purchase and clean up. Brownfield investigation and cleanup funding up to \$625,000 will become available before the LRC takes title to the sites. The LRC already has completed a Phase One environmental study along The Ramble, eliminating the need for that investment by developers. The LRC is seeking funding from the Bond Bill and NCALL.
- Building lot. The town owns a vacant lot at the corner of Market and Oak streets in the commercial district. The town is willing to donate this lot with to the LRC or a developer for a use that realizes the DDD vision and goals.
- Project Pop-Up. The LRC and DEDO has a successful three-month run with Project Pop-Up in 2015, and the LRC plans to continue this program in 2016, offering three months' free rent to start-up businesses locating on its rental properties.
- Business technical assistance. This incentive would include social-media training focused on the nature and heritage tourism industry and tourists. Many local businesses, including potential B&Bs, are unfamiliar with social media and how to reach potential nature and heritage tourists. It would also include information about short-term rentals such as Airbnb. The LRC has agreed to fund this training, which would take place in early 2017.
- Installation of green stormwater infrastructure, nature-based playground and trail network. The Ramble plan includes a trail network that links the entire length of Laurel's Broad Creek waterfront. Also, ForeSite Associates conducted a detailed assessment of The Ramble footprint and proposed various low-impact green stormwater installations such as constructed wetlands, filter strips and a living shoreline. The stormwater installations would cost an estimated \$653,000. The town and LRC are seeking funding for the infrastructure, playground and trail network, which would be amenities that a developer or developers would not have to pay for themselves. As of May 2016, funding has not been finalized, although detailed conceptual drawings and budget pricing have been prepared.



## *Downtown Development Districts*

### Application for Designation as a District

### Summary of Local Incentives - continued 20%

Summarize the package of Local Incentives, and describe how these incentives will work in concert with the Downtown Development District benefits to encourage revitalization and economic development in your proposed District (please limit your response to 750 words or less).

The local incentives work together to reduce up-front costs of making an investment in Laurel. They recognize the critical role the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation plays in the town's redevelopment, especially within the Downtown Development District area. If the LRC had not been operating along Laurel's waterfront and in its central business district for the last 30 years, Laurel would not be in a position to successfully implement a DDD.

The incentives also are relatively easy to administer and do not require a separate schedule of sewer/water or other ongoing rates within the DDD. They mostly represent the sacrifice of future revenues rather than money lost from current town coffers. The fact that Laurel has the lowest Median Household Income of any municipality in Delaware and has seen virtually no new construction over the last several years is reflected in the town's balance sheet.

Lastly, the incentives are not just focused on jobs but on the overall community. A third of Laurel's housing stock dates to 1939 or earlier. The proposed Community Improvement Program will address the continuum of housing problems in Laurel: owner-occupied, rentals, large historic homes, and commercial properties. Any effort to revitalize a struggling community must include a focus on its residents and where they live.

The incentives move forward on all fronts – acquiring and cleaning up strategic properties, installing infrastructure and amenities, reducing the cost of land, reducing water and sewer impact fees depending on the size of the project, waiving any town property taxes on improvements, helping businesses within the DDD grow and prosper, and assisting residents with the rehabilitation of their properties.

The town does not view “expedited permitting” as an authentic incentive. The town has a very simple, straightforward process for approving new development. Given the current flexible zoning within the DDD, it is unlikely a rezoning would be necessary – especially after the zoning classifications are reviewed and modified per the DDD District Plan to reflect the goals of the DDD. The town and LRC would strategically partner to expedite any proposed development that meets those goals.

Also, expedited permitting at the local level can only go so far if state approvals from DelDOT,



## ***Downtown Development Districts***

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### **Application for Designation as a District**

DNREC, SHPO and other agencies are required.



## *Downtown Development Districts*

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Application for Designation as a District

### **Legislative Body Resolution**

**Note: All local governments must provide a resolution from the local legislative body, even those with an application on file from a previous round. Applicants with applications on file must provide a resolution acted upon during the current application period. Resolutions from 2014 will not be accepted.**

**Instructions:** Attach a resolution that has been adopted by the legislative body of your municipality or county. The resolution must affirmatively indicate that the legislative body supports the application for designation as a Downtown Development District and is willing to adhere to the District Plan and the Local Incentives for the duration of the District designation.

Date of Resolution 5-16-2016

Resolution Number 2016-3

Resolution Attached.

## Proposed DDD Incentives - Town of Laurel

	Description	Comment	Source
<b>Community improvement: Housing rehabilitation rental and owner-occupied (detailed memo prepared)</b>	Targeted one-stop, no-wrong-door program to rehab homes and promote home ownership within DDD; also acquire vacant properties	Addresses critical issue within DDD - coordinate with USDA, DSHA and various nonprofits to fund loans and grants for owner-occupied and rental properties	LRC, Habitat, USDA, NCALL, Historic Tax Credit, Town, SEU Energy Credit
<b>Coordinator: Program creation, development and marketing (one-time cost)</b>	Position that will create and implement the above program	This program involves loans and grants from many different sources, with different qualifying incomes. This position would develop, coordinate and market the program.	\$12,900 LRC board approved (one time, this person would create and implement a program that could be handed off to town, LRC, nonprofits)
<b>Discounted land/ leases on parcels owned by Laurel Redevelopment Corporation</b>	A minimum 25 percent discount on land owned by Laurel Redevelopment Corporation, including waterfront	Will help attract targeted development to Ramble area, reduce risk of redevelopment	LRC board has approved contingent on DDD designation. Parcels identified and displayed on interactive map.
<b>Purchase and cleanup of key strategic sites within Ramble</b>	LRC has identified at least two sites (one a certified brownfield, the other a former town dump underneath wetlands) that it intends to purchase and clean up.	Brownfield cleanup funds not available to private landowners.  Acquiring these sites and cleanup would make them available to commercial enterprises within DDD  LRC has paid for Phase I environmental study along the entire Ramble, another cost savings for future developers	Phase I environmental study completed for \$50,000 along the entire Ramble, another cost savings for future developers.  Funds from LRC, NCALL, Bond Bill, DNREC
<b>Building lot</b>	Free lot to business that meets our development goals within DDD	Town will donate lot at Market and Oak Streets to business that meets DDD goals	Town Council approval contingent on DDD designation
<b>Project Pop-up</b>	Free short-term commercial space within DDD	The LRC participated in this program in 2015 and intends to continue the commitment	LRC, DEDO

	<b>Description</b>	<b>Comment</b>	<b>Source</b>
<b>Facade improvement</b>	Improve commercial building appearance along Market Street	Only 6-8 facades - architectural consult and actual matching funds or loans for rehab	LRC, NCALL  No discreet funding ID'd yet
<b>Green stormwater infrastructure</b>	Developer will not have to pay these costs	This is a major up-front cost that need to be done correctly - LRC has paid for initial feasibility study for various sites along Ramble	DNREC, Bond Bill, Community Transportation Fund  Feasibility study paid for - \$75,000
<b>Install nature-based playground and trail network within Ramble</b>	Installed infrastructure and amenity for developer/builder and community	Trail network would be a valuable amenity for current and new residents, as well as visitors	Town, LRC, Bond Bill, Community Transportation Fund  Funding not secured yet
<b>Sewer/water connection and impact fees</b>	Waive or reduce these fees within DDD - \$7,000 per EDU combined water/sewer impact fees	These are high relative to most Delaware municipalities - significant up-front cost that will be a deterrent	Town Council to approve graduated fee reduction based on number of EDUs contingent on DDD designation  1-3 EDUs: 40% 4-7 EDUs: 50% 8 or more EDUs: 60%
<b>Property tax abatement on improvements</b>	Waive property taxes over a period of time on the value of improvements	Will provide another incentive for commercial redevelopment	Town Council approval approve contingent on DDD designation - for a period of 5 years from CO
<b>Business technical assistance</b>	Social media training focused on the nature and heritage tourism industry	Many local businesses, including potential B&Bs, are unfamiliar with social media and how to reach potential nature and heritage tourists	LRC will issue RFP after DDD designation

## Recommendation to town on sewer/water impact fees

A brewpub could be 10 EDUs or more - the cottages would be 12-13

Suggested reduction:

1-3 EDUS 40% reduction in water/sewer impact fees

4-7 EDUS 50% reduction in water/sewer impact fees

8 or more 60% reduction

BrightFields Estimates for Green Infrastructure	
Cypress Bridge North	\$146,300
Governor's Park and Independence Playground	\$123,100
Janosik Park	\$107,000
The Cottages at Laurel Mills	\$151,000
The Village Green	\$56,800
Cypress Bridge South	\$68,800

## Water/Wastewater Chart

Water and Sewer Fee Comparison	Base water	Water rate	Water impact	Water connection	Base sewer	Sewer rate	Sewer impact	Sewer connection
Laurel	12.50	4.26 per 1000	3000 per EDU	1000-2250	36.50	5.75 per 1000	4000 per EDU	4000 per EDU
Dover	no base	2.65 per 1000			no base	3.00 per 1000		
Seaford	no base	21.95 flat	yes		no base	44.30 flat	yes	
Millsboro	no base	30 cents per 100	950 per EDU	actual costs	no base	90 cents per 100	5128 per EDU	actual costs
Georgetown	no base	3.13 per 1000	2069 per EDU	600 minimum plus costs	no base	6.04 per 1000	9751 per EDU	600 minimum plus costs
Milford	no base	3.50 per 1000 (avg.)	2626 per EDU	actual costs	no base	2.78 per 1000	1334 per EDU	actual costs
Bridgeville	7.50	3.35 per 1000 (avg.)	500/750 infill		\$24 for first 2500 gallons	7.10 per 1000	6000/1080 infill	
Sussex - Blades						\$286 per EDU/year		3570
Sussex - Dagsboro	not publicly listed		300 per EDU		no base	\$286 per EDU/year		6800 per EDU Sussex County

This is an incomplete listing, with some apples and oranges comparisons. Laurel ranges on the high side for its sewer- and water-related fees.

## Town-owned lot - Market and Oak



## Commercial facades

### Priority 1 - Market Street



**Priority 2 - Market Street**



**Priority 3 - Re-emphasize the historic movie theater**





# Town of LAUREL DELAWARE

## RESOLUTION 2016-3

### A RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT AN APPLICATION FOR DESIGNATION AS A DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT

WHEREAS, under the Downtown Development Districts Act, 22 Del.C. §§ 1901 et seq. (the "Act"), the State of Delaware may designate districts within Delaware's cities, towns and unincorporated areas that will qualify for significant development incentives and other State benefits; and

WHEREAS, these districts are known as Downtown Development Districts ("Districts"); and

WHEREAS, the State is accepting applications for the designation of the initial round of Districts, with such applications being due on June 1, 2016; and

WHEREAS, under the Act, each applicant must submit a plan that includes the boundaries of, and detailed planning and development strategy for, the proposed District (the "District Plan"); and

WHEREAS, under the Act, each applicant must also propose incentives that address local economic and community conditions, and that will help achieve the purpose set forth in the Act (the "Local Incentives"); and

WHEREAS, if an application is successful and the Town receives District designation, the District Plan and Local Incentives proposed by an applicant shall be binding upon the applicant; and

WHEREAS, the incentives associated with designation as Downtown Development District would greatly benefit current and future residents, businesses, non-profit organizations, and others within the Town of Laurel; and

WHEREAS, the Mayor and Council of the Town of Laurel strongly believes that it is in the best interest of the Town of Laurel to apply for District designation.

### NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT:

1. The Town of Laurel supports the Application for Designation as a Downtown Development Districted prepared by Lee Ann Walling, of Cedar Creek Sustainable Planning Services, Town and dated May 16, 2016; and
2. The Town of Laurel is authorized to appoint the Town Manager of the Town of Laurel (the "Town Manager") to file the Application on behalf of the Town, and to provide such other documents and information as may be necessary or desirable in connection with the Applicant; and

3. If the Applications is successful and the Town of Laurel receives notice that it has been selected for designation as a District:

- a. The Town shall adhere to the District Plan and the Local Incentives contained in the Application for the duration of the District designation; and
- b. The Town Manager, or his or her designee(s), is authorized to execute such documents and enter into such agreement as may be necessary or desirable in connection with the Downtown Development District program and the rights and obligations of the Town of Laurel thereunder; and
- c. The Town Manager, or his or her designee(s), is authorized to carry out all District administrative and reporting requirements on behalf of the Town of Laurel for the duration of the District.

I, John Shwed, Mayor of the Town Council of the Town of Laurel, hereby certify that the foregoing is a true and correct copy of a Resolution adopted by the Town Council of the Town of Laurel at its meeting held on May 16, 2016, at which a quorum was present and voting throughout and that the same is still in full force and effect.

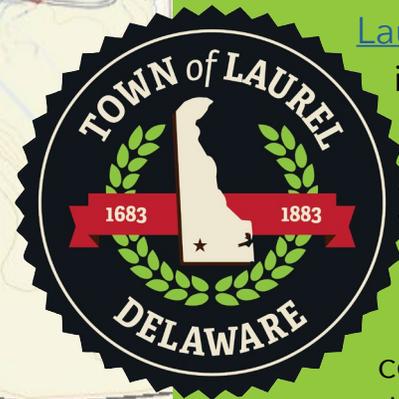
  
Mayor

  
President of Council

**The promise.  
The need.  
The plan.  
The perks.**

Please view our interactive [story map](#).

Our website, [Reimagine Laurel](#), includes information and public engagement features about redevelopment efforts, the comprehensive plan and the Downtown Development District.



# Downtown Development District Plan

Town of Laurel





# The promise.

**Laurel** has the lowest Median Household Income (\$33,387) of any town in Delaware, according to the U.S. Census' 2010-2014 American Community Survey. Despite its very attractive waterfront and the redevelopment activities along it, the overall economy remains somewhat stagnant. Sandwiched between Seaford and Salisbury, Md., the town is not enjoying the retail growth leaders seek along its U.S. 13 corridor.

Only three residential dwellings have been built in Laurel over the past three years - a Habitat for Humanity home and two rental units. Like most towns in Delaware and elsewhere, a once thriving downtown where locals gathered and shopped is just a faded memory for older residents.

As a symptom of downtown malaise, recent market data demonstrate that the second largest income generator within the municipality is alcohol sales, representing more than 12 percent of the town's total annual economic impact.

The town struggles with vacant homes, among them some of Laurel's Victorian gems, as residents grow too old to care for them and move away. Almost half of the residential properties within the proposed DDD are rental units, and many are owned by absentee landlords who are difficult to hold accountable.

While this paints a rather dismal picture of the town's fortunes, Laurel has taken significant steps forward in recent years. Since its inception in 1992, the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation has acquired 30 properties along Broad Creek and in the downtown business district; built and managed new commercial space; constructed upscale villas after purchasing and clearing an old industrial site; established public parks; and stabilized the Broad Creek shoreline.

Their work has made it feasible to envision and design The Ramble, a mixed-use project on either side of Broad Creek; it will include a pocket cottage neighborhood, village shops, a network of trails, a nature-based playground and a wetlands education area. The LRC intends to acquire more properties to make The Ramble a reality.

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## Links to reports mentioned in the plan and application:

- The [Ramble Redevelopment Proposal](#)
- [Growing While Protecting Our Water Quality](#)
- Ramble Phase One [Environmental Assessment](#)
- Ramble Green Infrastructure [Assessment](#) (ForeSite)
- Nature/Heritage Tourism [Assessment and Recommendations](#)
- DDD Housing Rehab/Home Ownership [Program](#)



The town recently adopted the branding recommendations of Arnett, Muldrow and Associates. “Laurel: Great Things Come Naturally” reflects the town’s setting along Broad Creek and its intention to become a launching point for nature and heritage tourism throughout the Nanticoke region.

If Laurel were just a collection of gloomy statistics, there would be no hope and no rationale for seeking a Downtown Development District designation. However, Laurel does have hope, a sense of its future and definitive plans to realize that future.

A Downtown Development District designation would reduce the risk and improve the attraction for redevelopment in Laurel’s core. It doesn’t necessarily mean that new investors would suddenly flock to Laurel. In spite of the long-term investment in the area by the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation and the town’s efforts to address substandard rental properties, the area is still blighted, and The Ramble parcels still have an industrial feel. Amenities such as the planned trail network need to be installed, some demolition needs to occur, and contaminated sites need to be cleaned up.

But given the relatively small size of the area, the excitement about The Ramble’s progress, and the incentives that will be available within the DDD, the designation would definitely create momentum for the type of transformational investment that could change Laurel’s destiny and attract residents, jobs and visitors to the town. The comprehensive plan could help embed this transformation in the town’s future.

Laurel is a cohesive community with citizens actively committed to making the community a livable destination for new residents, employees in new jobs, and visitors. With the LRC, the town has a track record of revitalization and consistent economic accomplishment over time. The DDD designation would be the catalyst to complete Laurel’s transformation.



# The need.

On the ground in Laurel and reviewing the town’s Census data, the need is evident – and acute. At \$33,387, Laurel’s median household income is 55 percent of Delaware’s (\$60,231) and 62 percent of Sussex County’s (\$55,305).

Laurel has a poverty rate of 25 percent, and 43 percent of its residents receive food stamps. Almost half of the residents (49.1 percent) are paying more than 30 percent of their income on housing and related costs – an indication that they are struggling to make ends meet.

The median home value in the town is \$131,300 vs. \$231,400 for Sussex County and \$232,900 for Delaware.

Almost 40 percent of the housing stock was built in 1949 or earlier; in fact, one third dates to 1939 or earlier. In Sussex County at large, only 7.5 percent of housing dates to 1949 or earlier. About 44 percent of the dwellings in town are rentals, and an estimated 21 percent of the housing units within the proposed DDD are considered vacant.

The median monthly rent in Laurel is \$661, compared to \$965 for Sussex County. The rental vacancy rate in Laurel is only 2.7 percent vs. 8.7 percent for Sussex County.

The town, despite an aggressive inspection and enforcement program especially

Laurel Income Statistics		
Category	Laurel	Delaware
Median Household Income	\$33,387	\$60,231
% of families/people below poverty level	24.7%	8.2%
% receiving food stamps	42.6%	12.7%
% unemployed	10.2%	8.5%

Source: 2010-2014 American Community Survey (US Census)



Laurel Housing Statistics		
Category	Laurel	Delaware
Built 1939 or earlier	33.3%	9.1%
Renter-occupied	43.9%	28.4%
Median home value	\$131,300	\$232,900
Paying more than 30% on housing costs	49.1%	33.4%

*Source: 2010-2014 American Community Survey (US Census)*

with regard to rental properties, has difficulty dealing with the large number of absentee landlords – many of whom bought properties on line and have never set foot in Delaware, let alone Laurel.

**Demographics.** Laurel, according to Census data, has a minority white population. Whites make up 44 percent of the town’s population, and African-Americans comprise 44 percent. The Hispanic population is estimated at 11 percent.

Laurel also has a surprisingly young population. According to the 2010-2014 American Community Survey (U.S. Census), the median age in Laurel is only 27.7 years, compared to 46.5 for Sussex County and 39.1 for Delaware. The largest single age cohort in Laurel is 0 to 5, at 14.5 percent. Only 8.5 percent of Laurel’s population is 65 or older, compared to 15.4 percent for Sussex County and 22.5 percent for Delaware.

This age data surprises many in Laurel. Many of these poorer, younger residents are “invisible” citizens because they live in the town’s subsidized housing or relatively cheap rental units and work outside of Laurel; 44 percent of Laurel residents drive 25 miles or more to work every day. Only 78 persons both live and work within Laurel’s town limits, according to the U.S. Census; 1,688 residents leave Laurel every day to work somewhere else.

Many homes, including some of the large Victorian homes that front Laurel’s main streets, are in disrepair. A few are abandoned, as their aging occupant lost control over maintenance and moved out. The town’s building and inspections department conducted an assessment of building conditions within the proposed DDD and rated the structures on a scale of 1 to 5; the results are included in the DDD [story map](#). There are 10 vacant homes within the DDD.



**Code violations.** The town pulled a report of code violations for the period April 1, 2013 through April 11, 2016. The software the town uses does not enable further breakdown or mapping of the violations, but the breakdown for that period is:

- Housing violation notice – 947
- Code violations – 137
- Mow property – 994
- Unlicensed rental – 221
- Vehicle expired (no tag) – 175
- Tow vehicle - 15

The violations relate to either the 2012 ICC International Property Maintenance Code (IPMC) or the town’s own code. Laurel’s chief building inspector estimates that about 25 percent of these violations occurred within the proposed DDD. The town maintains an aggressive posture toward enforcement, especially of rental properties.



**Building activity.** There were only three new residences constructed in Laurel between January 2013 and March 2016; one was built by Sussex County Habitat for Humanity, and two were rental units. A second Habitat house is currently under construction.

A review of permits issued for the town and the specific DDD area during that period show minimal activity. The largest projects over the last three years are the fitout of a new renal dialysis facility on US 13, the planned demolition of the old Laurel Central Middle School and the construction of a new Family Dollar store (all outside the DDD area). Most of the projects were window and roof replacements, installation of solar panels, and other repairs and minor additions.

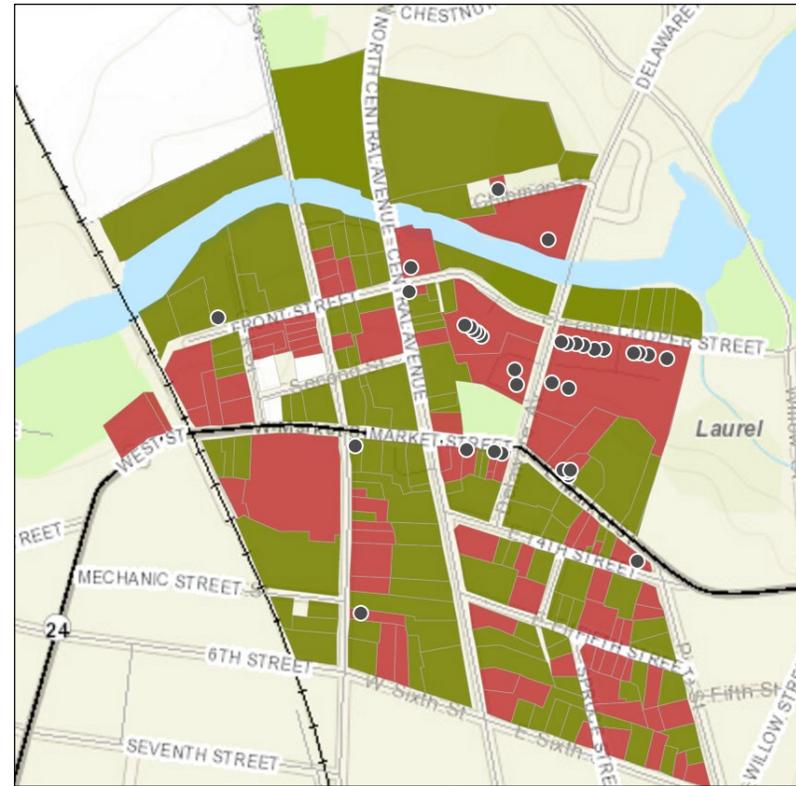
Over the last 15 years, Sussex County’s Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program spent \$969,144 to rehabilitate 78 properties within Laurel. According to the program, 25 homes in Laurel are on a waiting list, although the county does not know exactly how much it will receive this fiscal year for projects in Laurel.

**Crime.** The Laurel Police Department pulled crime statistics for the proposed DDD area over the period from January 1, 2013 through April 24, 2016. They indicate a fairly high level of criminal activity in this 71-acre area:

- **Crimes against persons (121).** Includes domestic offenses (55), intimidation (10), aggravated assault (4), rape (2), robbery at gunpoint (3), robbery at knifepoint (1), simple assault (25) and stalking (1).
- **Crimes against property (129).** Includes burglary, embezzlement, fraud, larceny, vandalism, motor vehicle theft and trespassing.
- **Crimes against society (54).** Includes drug violations (29), disorderly conduct (16), drunkenness, intimidation, liquor law violations and weapons offenses (5).



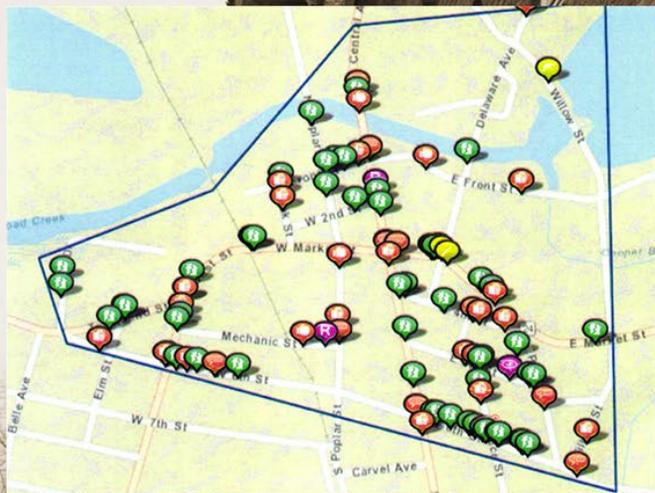
See crime data displayed graphically on next page.



Above, rental properties along Spruce Street within the proposed DDD. Top, the parcels in red are rental properties, according to the Town’s Building Inspection department. The dots represent commercial properties. There are about 10 vacant homes within the DDD, such as the one pictured at left.



Crime data for the Downtown Development District Area, January 1, 2013 through April 24, 2016. The heat maps show the section of the DDD where these types of crime are occurring most intensely. *Data analyzed by Laurel Police Department.*



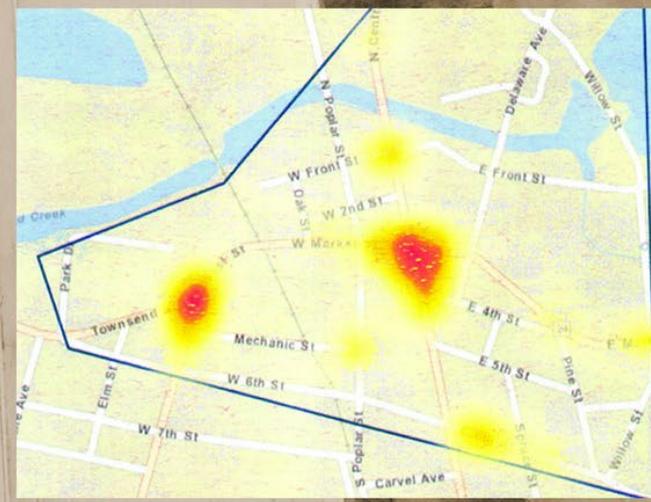
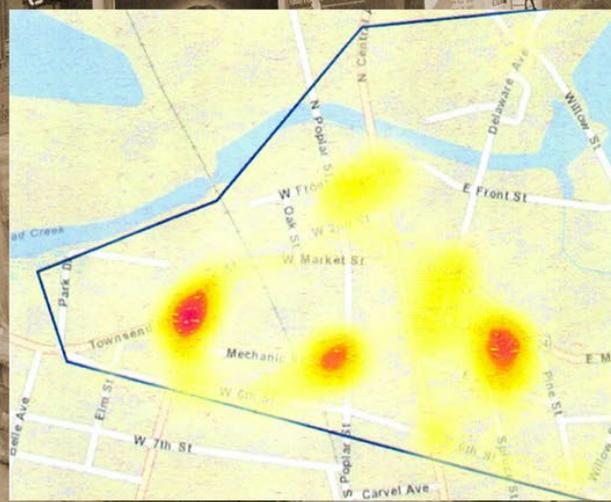
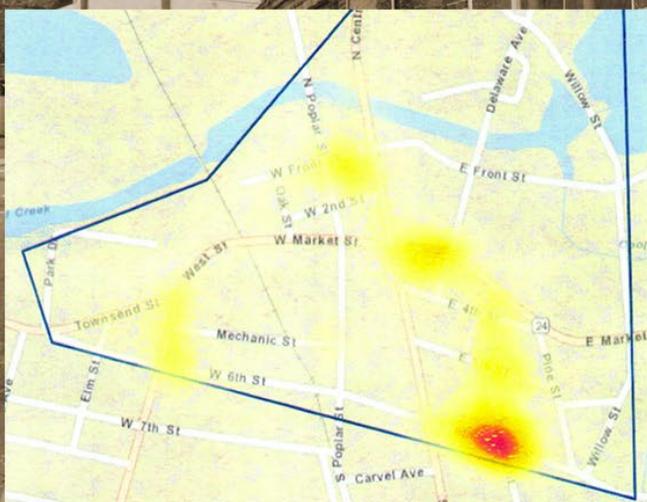
**Crimes against persons**



**Crimes against property**



**Crimes against society**



## Census template for Laurel

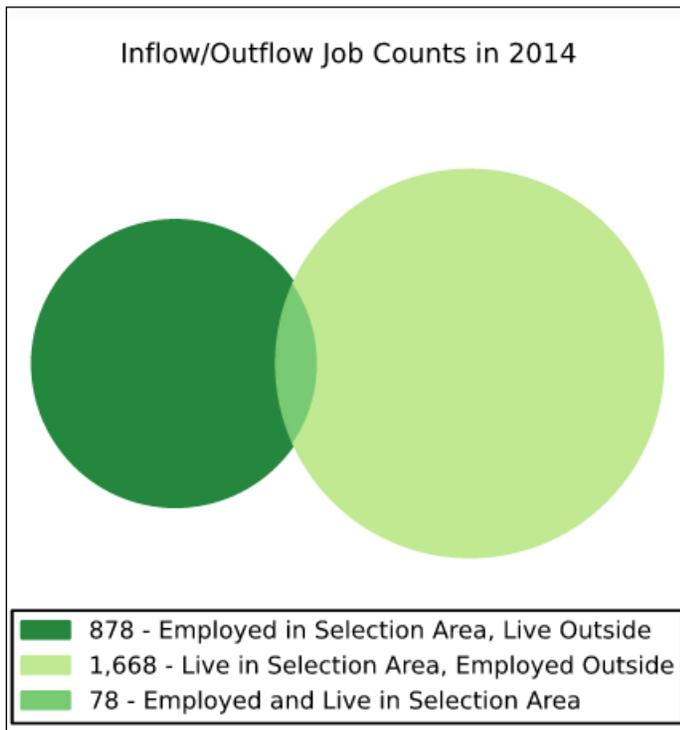
Statistic	Delaware	Sussex	DDD*	Laurel Town	Tract 518.02	Block 1	Block 2
Total Population	917,060	203,737	352	3816	4337	2918	1419
Median Household Income	\$60,231	\$53,505	\$43,294	\$33,387	\$39,428		
Poverty Rate, All People	8.2%	9.1%	13.3%	24.7	23.0		
% Housing Built 1949 or earlier	13.7	7.5	38.5	38.5	39.5		
% Homeownership	71.6	78.1	62.7	56.1	67.4	61.3	79.3
% Rental	28.4	21.9	37.3	43.9	32.6	38.7	20.7
% Vacant Housing Units	17.6	37.8	20.7	11.3	8.6	12.8	15.5
Median Home Value	\$232,900	\$231,400	\$151,786	\$131,300	\$148,600		
% Low / Mod Income	37.8%	36.1%		50.0%	43.5%	43.3%	44.1%

\*Information for DDD is from ESRI Community Analyst, 2009-2013 American Community Survey estimate. Reliability of data within this polygon is considered low. Remaining data from 2010-2014 American Community Survey. % Low/Moderate Income from HUD Exchange.

## Income comparisons- Sussex County

Town	Median Household Income
Laurel	33,387
Blades	34,286
Seaford	35,813
Delmar	35,938
Selbyville	40,195
Greenwood	41,500
Ellendale	41,563
Frankford	42,396
Millsboro	46,403
Georgetown	47,525
Dagsboro	47,614
Milton	49,615
Milford	52,274
Bridgeville	52,639
Lewes	55,917
Rehoboth	79,297

### Inflow/Outflow Job Counts in 2014



### Age distribution in Laurel

	Laurel	Sussex	Delaware
Median age	27.7	46.5	39.1
Under 5	14.5%	5.7%	6.1%
25 to 34	15%	10.5%	12.8%
65 and older	8.5%	15.4%	22.5%

All Census data from 2010-2014 American Community Survey unless otherwise noted. Left, an inflow/outflow analysis from the U.S. Census Bureau's Center for Economic Studies shows that only 78 people both live and work in Laurel - 44 percent of Laurel residents drive 25 miles or more one way to work every day, with 26 percent driving more than 50 miles each way.



# The plan.

The plan for the 71-acre Downtown Development District will be included as an element of Laurel's comprehensive plan update this year. The district plan's overall vision is to enhance the commercial viability, walkability and livability of Laurel's core. The following key priorities will help Laurel achieve that vision:

1. Ensure that zoning and permitted land uses, as well as design standards, further the vision of a commercially viable, walkable and livable town core;
2. Bring The Ramble waterfront redevelopment initiative to life and attract businesses that will further Laurel's goals for sustainable economic development;
3. Improve the condition of both owner-occupied and rental housing and encourage home ownership; and
4. Ensure that the town's key natural asset, Broad Creek, is protected from pollution, erosion and uses that devalue it.

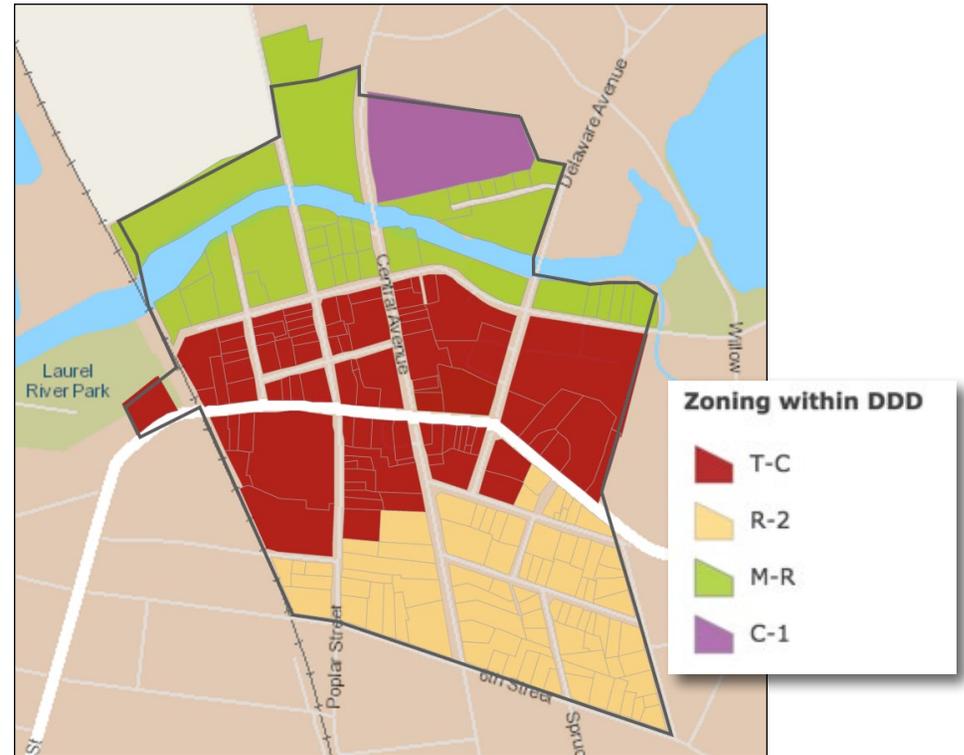
Each of these priorities has several supporting objectives. While they are detailed, there is a public engagement process associated with the update of Laurel's comprehensive plan. Since public work on the plan just began in April, this district plan will get as specific as possible while still allowing room for further public input. That includes members of council, as three of Laurel's four council wards overlap the proposed DDD.

## Category 1: Adjust zoning and permitted land uses

After Laurel's comprehensive plan was updated in 2011, the town adopted a more modern zoning code. With a few adjustments, the zoning categories and permitted uses work well in the proposed DDD.

The mixed-use core of the DDD is zoned Town Center, which is a mixed-use category "historic and pedestrian in nature," according to the town's [Zoning Ordinance](#). "It is a district that is utilized for an intensive and traditional mixture of small-scale retail, cultural, conference and meeting, lodging, business, personal service, financial, institutional, office, residential and governmental uses."

The area that includes the proposed Ramble is zoned as a Marine Resources district, which also fits the planned land use for this area. This district "recognizes the



unique role which Broad Creek and its waterfront areas have played in the formation, growth and life of The Town of Laurel," the town's code states. The purpose is to preserve the view and tree canopy, buffer property and residents from flooding, protect water quality, and control erosion along the shoreline.

One property within the Downtown Development District is zoned commercial (Pizza King). Medium-density residential zoning is south of the Town Center district. The uses allowed and not allowed within T-C and M-R zones need to be modified to ensure that they do not present barriers to redevelopment or allow uses incompatible with redevelopment goals.

For example, Town Center allows stand-alone bars and nightclubs. The permitted uses should be changed to exclude those and allow brewpubs, wine bars or similar establishments that serve meals.

Liquor stores should be explicitly prohibited within T-C and M-R. If and when the grandfathered liquor store currently located on Front Street goes out of business, the town and LRC should take steps to prevent another one from locating there.



## Category 1 recommendations

- Align the permitted uses within the Marine Resources district with its stated purpose in the zoning ordinance. Some uses appear to be incompatible with the protection of Broad Creek and its viewshed.
- Rezone the one property zoned Commercial to Marine Resources, or at least a subdivided portion of that property.
- Review the permitted uses within each DDD zoning classification to ensure that they do not present barriers to redevelopment or permit uses that are incompatible with redevelopment.
- Take steps to ensure that the commercial center along Market Street is attractive and welcoming to visitors and walkers. Present these establishments with options and give them a reasonable timetable to comply.
- Develop and adopt landscaping and building design standards and a pattern book to preserve the character and look and feel of the T-C and M-R districts.
- Pursue funding for a facade improvement program that will offer incentives for building owners to participate (such as a low-interest loan or matching grant).
- Adopt an ordinance regarding consistent signage requirements within the DDD.
- During the comprehensive plan update process, work with DelDOT to develop a "Complete Streets" approach to circulation in the area.
- During the comprehensive plan update, revisit the size of Laurel's Historic District and the purpose and requirements of the district - especially within the DDD area.

*Laurel has vacant and unsightly storefronts that make walking downtown undesirable.*

Other uses currently permitted within T-C such as self-service laundries and amusement centers should be reconsidered.

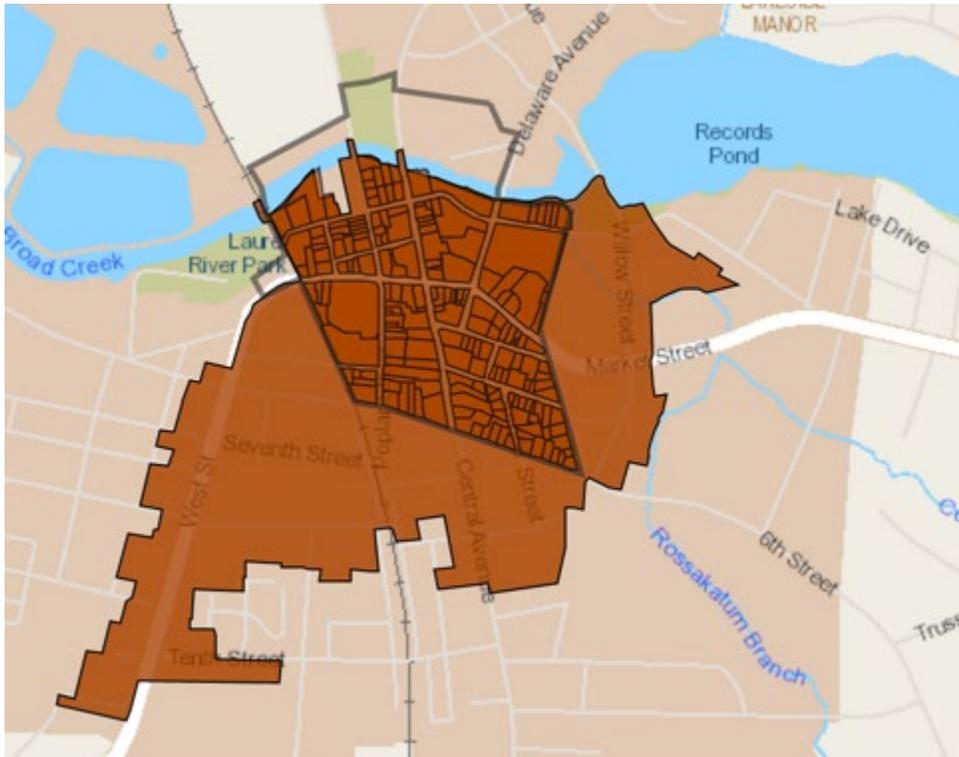
Uses such as pocket neighborhoods and bed and breakfast establishments should be allowed as a special permitted use subject to adopted design and landscaping standards. The town should consider allowing but regulating short-term vacation rentals, such as Airbnb.

The designer of The Ramble project, Dr. Jules Bruck of the University of Delaware, has drafted landscape design standards for those parcels. They should be reviewed and implemented along with building design standards that reflect the character of Laurel's downtown and promote walkability. For example, metal buildings should not be permitted, and parking requirements should be revised to reduce paved surfaces.

A UD intern studying Landscape Horticulture will be developing these standards during summer 2016.

Laurel boasts the largest historic district in the state - with almost 800 structures. Except for The Ramble area, all of the proposed DDD is within the Historic District. The comprehensive plan update should review the size and purpose of Laurel's district and what inclusion in it means for the property owner, the town and the cause of historic preservation.





Except for The Ramble area, the entire DDD is included within Laurel's Historic District.

The commercial district within the DDD includes some vacant storefronts, churches and other uses that do not maintain regular business hours. These buildings make the area unattractive to passersby and contradict the stated purpose of the Town Center district.

Building facades are in need of restoration and more attractive and consistent signage. The town can adopt a vacancy treatment standard governing empty storefronts, consistent signage requirements, and require uses in these buildings to maintain regular business hours. An implementation schedule would give these establishments time to adapt.

Permitted uses within the Marine Resources district should be reviewed to ensure they are compatible with the stated purpose of the zone. Uses such as a marina, boat refueling and watercraft sales are likely incompatible and would be difficult to permit under the state's Watershed Implementation Plan for the Chesapeake Watershed, which includes Broad Creek.

With some adjustments to its zoning ordinance, the town would ensure that its code is conducive to achieving the goals of the Downtown Development District. A district overlay and/or form-based code is not necessary and, in fact, would require outside resources to develop, implement and maintain. An objective of this district plan is to scale DDD implementation for a small town such as Laurel.

As the comprehensive plan process continues, the town should work with DelDOT to identify and implement a "Complete Streets" approach to traffic in the area. "Complete Streets" ensure that mobility is planned and effective for more than motor vehicles and that walkers, cyclists, handicapped persons and transit riders can easily get around.

## Category 2: Bring The Ramble to life

A robust public engagement effort gave birth to The Ramble. The University of Delaware's Sustainable Coastal Communities Initiative was asked to facilitate a community visioning process focusing on the Broad Creek waterfront in Laurel's downtown commercial district. UD initially became involved to lead a land use/growth scenario process and recommend nutrient reduction strategies to protect water quality in the Broad Creek, a tidal tributary to the Chesapeake Bay. However, this effort took an unusual twist when community leaders asked for help bringing people and jobs back to downtown Laurel.

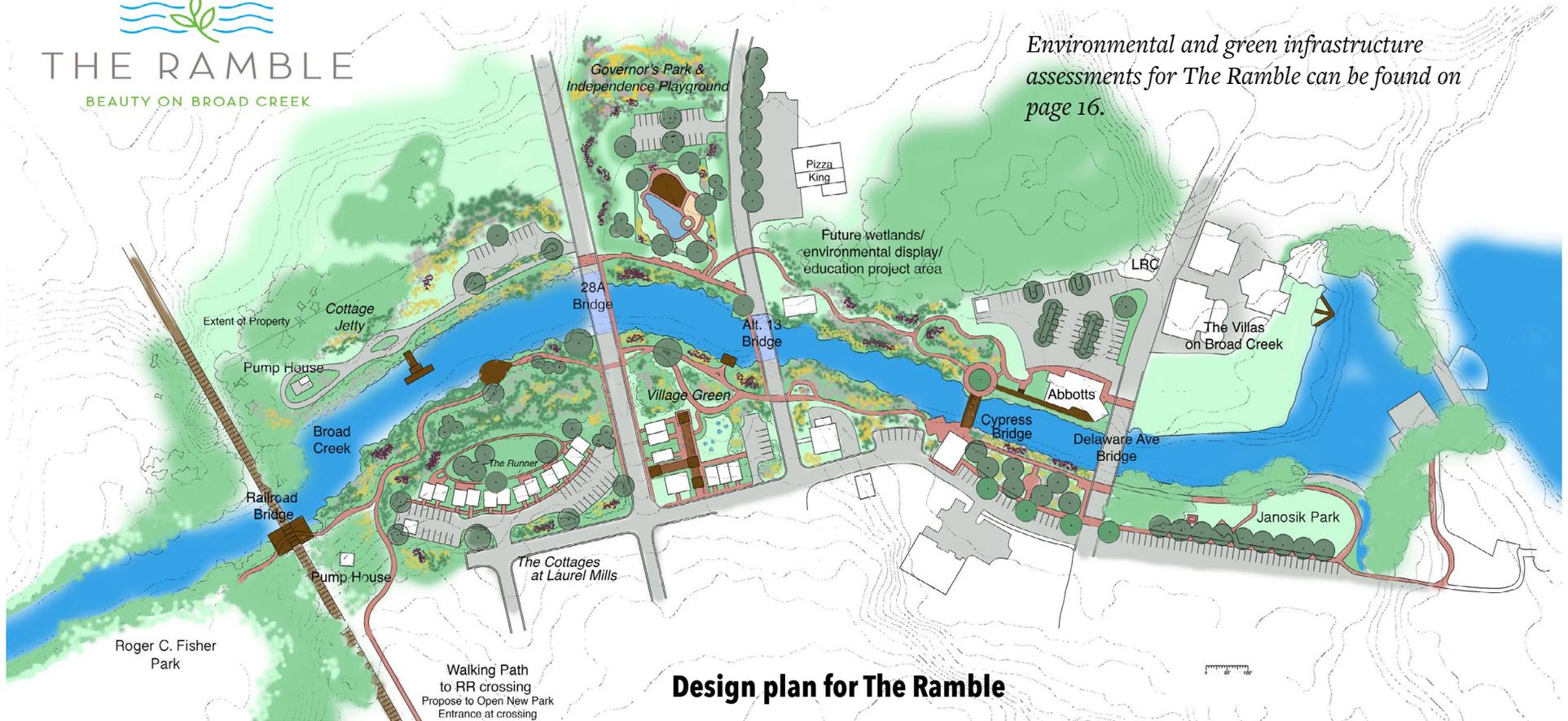
When asked to reimagine a viable waterfront area 20 years in the future, a stakeholder committee offered a grand vision, which included elements such as a pocket-style neighborhood, mixed-use commercial development, a kayak launch, a children's play area, and a brewpub just to name a few, all of which might be found along a beautifully landscaped riverwalk.

Subsequently, a unique partnership orchestrated by UD between the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation and an assistant professor of landscape architecture at the University of Delaware and her graduate and undergraduate students resulted in a conceptual site plan and artist renderings offered in a sustainable waterfront redevelopment proposal called The Ramble (see next page).





**THE RAMBLE**  
BEAUTY ON BROAD CREEK



*Environmental and green infrastructure assessments for The Ramble can be found on page 16.*

### **Design plan for The Ramble**

This proposal featured green infrastructure that supported many of the design elements the stakeholder group had suggested for the available properties, 95 percent of which are owned by the LRC or the town. The plan was enthusiastically endorsed by the LRC, the Town council and the Laurel Chamber of Commerce as well as numerous local business and civic organizations.

In September 2015, the community and visitors had a chance to plan and envision what The Ramble would look, feel and taste like with an event patterned after the “Better Block” approach - activating a vision for a block or site without waiting for local planning efforts and approvals to occur.

In response to the community’s desire to add value to the economic development goals of The Ramble by attracting paddlers, cyclists, birders, and heritage tourists,

the planning team secured a \$14,000 grant from DEDO Downtown Delaware to support development of a nature-based and heritage tourism plan for Laurel. Sea Grant also contributed \$5,000 towards implementation of the final plan.

A 1.5-day workshop was convened in November 2015 to seek input for this plan and was attended by a stakeholder group comprised of community leaders, tourism professionals, state resource planners, conservationists, and business owners. The final plan was released during a May 2016 event celebrating Laurel’s natural resources and ecotourism opportunities. This event also dedicated the new kayak launch, the first constructed component of the proposed The Ramble design.

Two studies funded with matching grants from DNREC were completed: 1) a Phase One environmental assessment of the entire proposed Ramble area; and 2)



## Category 2 recommendations

- Acquire strategic parcels that are key to successful implementation of The Ramble plan.
- Complete low-impact green stormwater installation for nature-based playground.
- Work with DNREC Site Investigation and Restoration program to secure brownfield cleanup funds for appropriate site *before* any acquisitions are completed.
- Continue to activate The Ramble site for festivals, paddling events and other public gatherings.
- Secure funding for and install nature-based playground and planned trail network, including connection under railroad trestle to Roger Fisher Park.
- Attract quality developer for planned pocket neighborhood of cottages. Have design standards in place (see Category 1).
- Attract signature commercial enterprises that further town's nature and heritage tourism objectives - such as a brewpub or outfitters.
- Adopt landscape architecture and design standards (see Category 1).
- Work with DeDOT to ensure context-sensitive design and pedestrian element of bridge rehabilitation project.
- Ensure that the Marine Resources zoning category provides the appropriate framework for The Ramble to build out (see Category 1).



a feasibility report proposing specific low-impact green stormwater infrastructure installations throughout The Ramble.

Community leaders and DNREC are actively pursuing funding for The Ramble's nature-based playground and proposed network of trails, including a link to Roger C. Fisher Park at The Ramble's western end, as well as the stormwater installations.

In addition, the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation wants to acquire at least two strategic parcels within The Ramble footprint: One, a former gas station, is already a certified brownfield; the other is mostly wetlands but covers a former town dump. The sites are eligible for up to \$625,000 in state investigation and cleanup funds.

The Ramble plan includes a pocket neighborhood of 12-13 camp-style cottages, and project leaders have met with a well-known high-end residential developer to assess the feasibility of the parcel and area for such a community.



Above, Town officials and citizens help plan the Fall Ramble event in September 2015. Left, the annual Broad Creek Bike and Brew ends in The Ramble area with music, food and festivities.



He suggested appropriate incentives, developer costs and price points for the cottages, recommending that the trail network be installed in advance as an amenity to entice a quality builder. In a bit of a Catch-22, he suggested that the area still needed to lose its “industrial” feel to be attractive to residential development.

The recommendations on page 12 continue the forward momentum of The Ramble and are a key element of the District Plan.

### Category 3: Improve community housing and home ownership

Improvement of the Downtown Development District community must include a focus on residential housing. As noted, one-third of Laurel’s housing dates to 1939 or earlier, compared to 9.1 percent for the state and 6.6 percent for Sussex County. Laurel’s DDD includes about 81 housing structures.

Within the DDD and throughout town, about 45 percent of the residential units are rentals. The town aggressively inspects and enforces against building and town code violations, but aging structures and absentee landlords make their jobs difficult.

Also, Census statistics indicate that almost half of Laurel’s residents struggle with housing affordability, spending 30 percent or more of their income on housing-related costs.

Some larger homes have been vacated as owners age and become unable to maintain their properties. Many once grand Victorian-era homes have fallen into disrepair, although a couple of homeowners already are planning significant renovations.

In April, the town and Laurel Redevelopment Corporation met with representatives of USDA Rural Development, Delaware State Housing Authority, NCALL and Sussex County Habitat for Humanity to discuss a planned, coordinated rehabilitation effort within the DDD. For example, Sussex County Habitat already has \$100,000 available for rehabilitation west of Central Avenue, an area that includes a high priority neighborhood for the town and LRC.

Other potential sources of funding and coordination would include the Community Development Block Grant program operated by Sussex County, the Sustainable Energy Utility’s DDD energy efficiency audit and rebate program, and the priority state Historic Tax Credits earmarked for DDDs. All of the properties within the DDD also are in Laurel’s Historic District.



*This “Old Town” neighborhood between The Ramble and Market Street and directly west of Central Avenue is a priority for rehabilitation.*

Banks that perform community lending also are being approached.

This program would be available only to residents within the DDD and, as such, is a significant incentive. In addition, the LRC has agreed to fund a position that would bring the program to life in a user-friendly format that would coordinate the various programs and make it seamless to the applicant.

This one-time position would:

- Secure community agreement on a name for the program
- Further assess the condition of rental and owner-occupied housing, including vacant properties, within Laurel’s Downtown Development District.
- Coordinate with all participating nonprofit programs to design a program that is easy for a variety of residents to access and participate in
- Apply for additional funding, such as NCALL and the Strong Neighborhoods



## Category 3 recommendations

- Design and implement a comprehensive home rehabilitation and homebuyer program with nonprofit partners.
- As an element of this program, address vacant properties to stabilize the neighborhood through a combination of enforcement, acquisition and rehabilitation appropriate to the property owner's circumstances.
- Provide a coordinator to design and launch the program, including initial outreach to all affected residents, in collaboration with nonprofit partners.
- Set priorities for the program, beginning in the mixed-use neighborhood west of Central Avenue and between The Ramble and Market Street.
- Ensure that owners of larger homes along Central Avenue and Market Street, who may not be income-qualified for other programs, are aware of the state Historic Tax Credit and other options.
- Secure low-interest loan availability from community lenders such as NCALL.
- Adopt an ordinance that requires absentee landlords to have a local property management company with whom tenants and the town can communicate.
- With increased attention to absentee landlords, provide assurances that tenants are not improperly displaced or subjected to unfair rent increases.
- Ensure that town codes are consistently and fairly enforced.
- Consider ordinance(s) permitting accessory dwelling units and short-term rentals such as Air B&B.

**For more information on Laurel's proposed DDD Community Improvement Program, visit this [link](#).**

Housing Fund (DSHA) to address related problems such as vacant and commercial properties

- Communicate in various ways, including door to door, with residents, homeowners and landlords within DDD
- Develop web portal for the program
- Develop informational and promotional materials, including in Spanish
- Work with the town to identify a permanent administrative "home" for the program and hand it off

The program also would encourage home ownership and provide links to appropriate programs. It would be designed and prepared in a manner that after it is launched and initial outreach occurs, the town could operate it.

Other recommendations in this category include adopting an ordinance that addresses the problems created mostly by absentee landlords. The town already requires a rental license and now prohibits subdividing single-family homes into rental units. Many jurisdictions require absentee landlords (e.g., living outside Sussex County) to have a local property management firm that can handle rentals, repairs, complaints and respond to enforcement actions.

Also, the town should ramp up enforcement against owner-occupied homes if those homes are vacant, derelict and/or create public safety or health issues. For whatever reason —outright neglect, aging owners, lack of resources—these properties are eyesores that damage the town's image.

To enhance affordability and encourage residents to stay in their homes, the town should consider ordinances that would permit accessory dwelling units, conversions to bed and breakfasts and short-term rentals such as Air B&B.

While the comprehensive plan likely will support the location of a chain hotel or motel along US 13, nature and heritage tourism visitors generally appreciate more authentic, local accommodations.

## Category 4: Protect Laurel's most valuable natural asset

Broad Creek is the focal point of Laurel's proposed Downtown Development District. It has been a magnet over the centuries - starting with the "Wading Place," a fording point used by Nanticoke Indians, located between where Delaware and Central avenues are today.

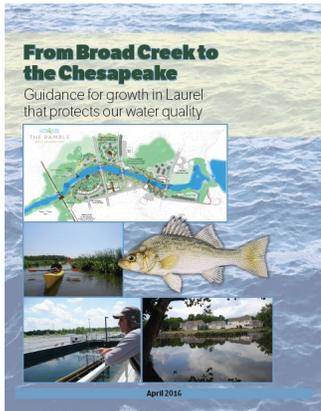


Broad Creek carried shipments of cucumbers and cantaloupes down to the Nanticoke River and out to Chesapeake Bay. In the 19th century along Broad Creek, shipbuilders were constructing three-masted schooners in Bethel, and canning and basket-making operations flourished in Laurel.

Today, barely a remnant of industry remains. With the efforts of the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation, the waterfront has been cleared and cleaned up—with parks, a restaurant, villas and office buildings replacing warehouses, a basket factory, and a tomato cannery.

Rather than industry, Laurel is now looking to Broad Creek as a source of scenic views, relaxation and low-impact tourism, such as kayaking and birding. Residents fish all along the shoreline. The Ramble redevelopment project features Broad Creek while avoiding its floodplain and protecting its water quality through green infrastructure practices.

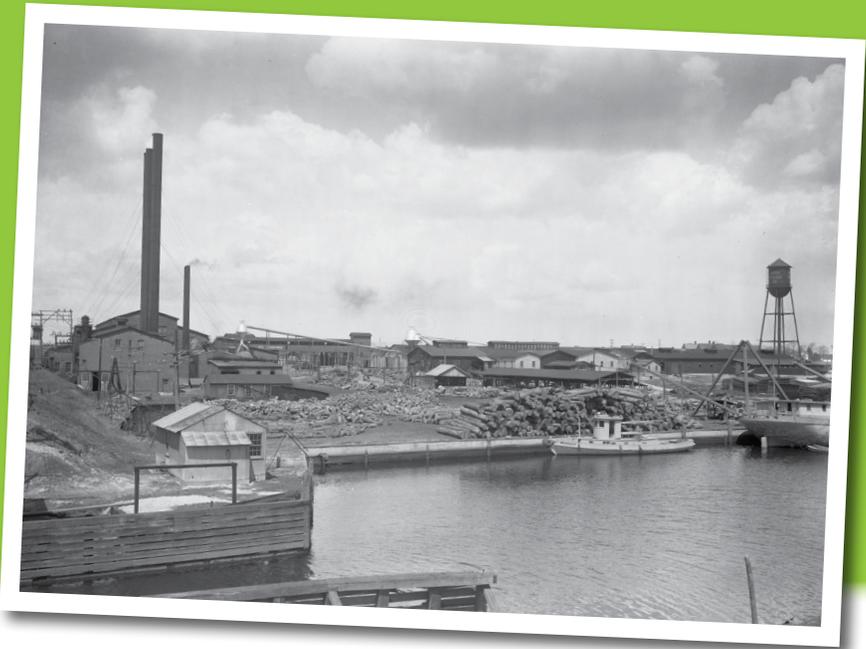
The Ramble complements efforts to prevent nutrient pollution, such as nitrogen and phosphorous from entering Broad Creek. As a tributary of the Nanticoke River, which flows into the Chesapeake Bay, Broad Creek is subject to federal limits on nitrogen and phosphorous and is expected to meet these water quality goals by



[Click to view the report](#)

a detailed assessment of steps Laurel can take to meet the water quality standards and still grow. The report was prepared for the University of Delaware's Sustainable Coastal Communities Initiative with DNREC/EPA funding.

Some of those steps include measures that can be taken within the Downtown Development District area. The report was released to the town in May 2016 and includes eight pages of recommendations.



*Industry used to thrive along Broad Creek in Laurel (Delaware State Archives)*

2025. The town is expected to maintain a baseline allocation of these pollutants that was established in 2011.

As mentioned earlier in this plan, permitted uses and requirements in the Marine Resources zoning district do not always align with the stated purpose of the district, which is to preserve the view and tree canopy, buffer property and residents from flooding, protect water quality, and prevent erosion along the shoreline.

If new development projects an increase in nitrogen and/or phosphorous entering the watershed, that increase must be offset through installation of best management practices - for example, constructed wetlands, filter strips, minimizing paved and other man-made surfaces, and controlling Canada Geese droppings.

The Ramble, with its planned sustainable and low-impact practices, can be used as a “credit bank” to offset growth in other areas of Laurel. The cottages, when built, could be models of sustainable design with a “net-zero” (or better) effect on water quality. The cottages are a signature element of The Ramble and should be built to a level of superior design.

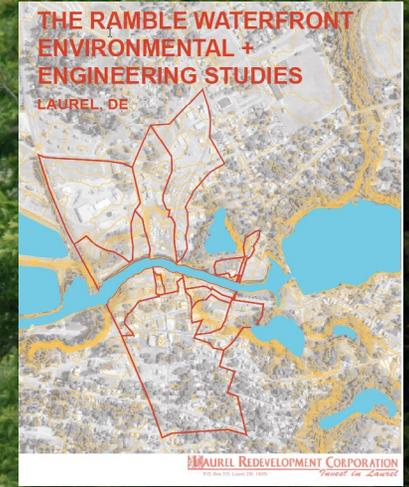
The footprint of any commercial or residential development within The Ramble and the Marine Resources district should be built to minimize its impact within the riparian area. In fact, the requirements of the imminent Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4) program (*see report*) likely will require low-impact development practices in the area.

**Note:** See next page for environmental and green infrastructure assessments.





Estimates for Green Infrastructure	
Cypress Bridge North	\$146,300
Governor's Park and Independence Playground	\$123,100
Janosik Park	\$107,000
The Cottages at Laurel Mills	\$151,000
The Village Green	\$56,800
Cypress Bridge South	\$68,800
Source: BrightFields	



*Above left, suggested green stormwater installation for The Ramble cottages. Center, cost estimates for all Ramble stormwater installations. Above, the feasibility report from ForeSite Associates. Far left, the Phase One Environmental Assessment from BrightFields.*

PHASE I  
ENVIRONMENTAL SITE ASSESSMENT  
THE RAMBLE WATERFRONT REDEVELOPMENT AREA  
LAUREL, DELAWARE

Prepared For:

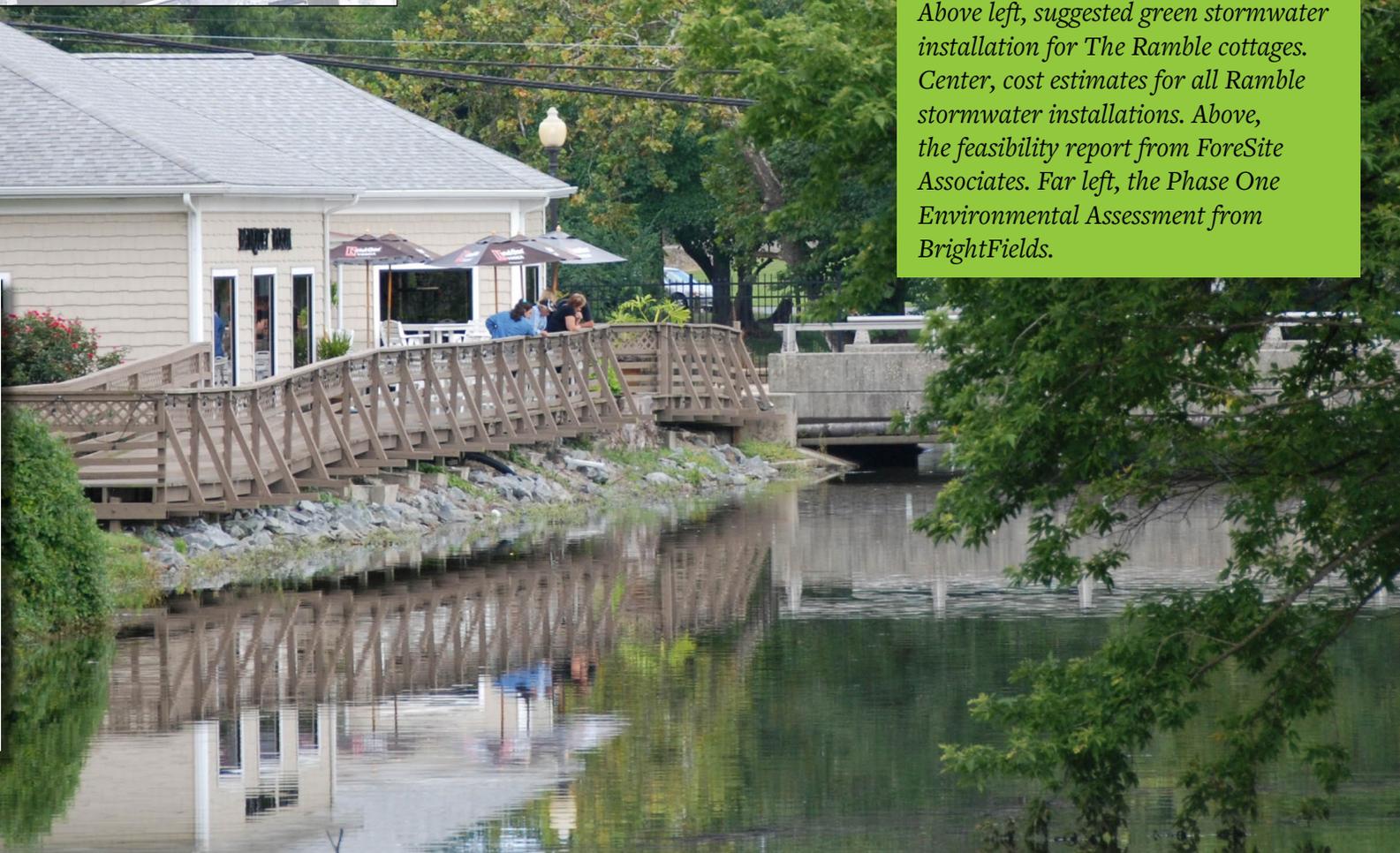
Laurel Redevelopment Corporation  
115 Delaware Avenue  
Laurel, Delaware

November 13, 2015

Prepared By:

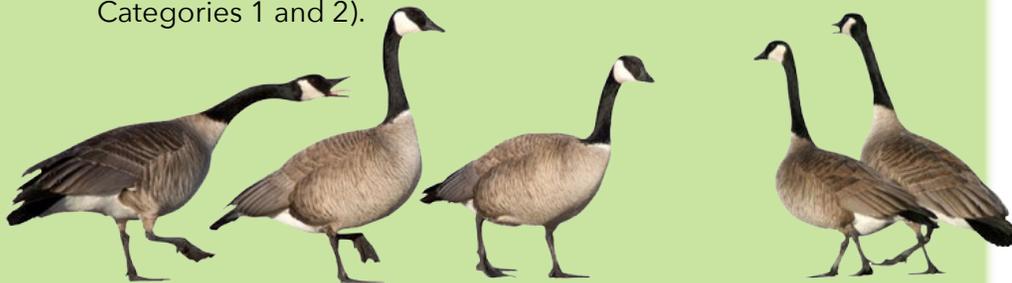
 **BrightFields, Inc.**  
801 INDUSTRIAL STREET  
WILMINGTON, DELAWARE 19801  
(302) 656-9600

File Number: 3299.01.51



## Category 4 recommendations

- Align the permitted uses within the Marine Resources district with its stated purpose in the zoning ordinance. Some uses appear to be incompatible with the protection of Broad Creek and its viewshed (same as Category 1).
- Make The Ramble a model of sustainable, low-impact development practices and perhaps a “credit bank” to offset development projects elsewhere in Laurel.
- Ensure that the cottages are built to superior design standards with at least a “net-zero” impact on water quality in Broad Creek.
- Construct the various proposed green infrastructure techniques proposed by ForeSite Associates along the length of The Ramble.
- Continue to partner with DNREC to identify sources of funding green stormwater installations throughout The Ramble.
- Ensure that, as planned, new development avoids the floodplain.
- Maintain and grow Laurel’s tree canopy, setting a goal in the Comprehensive Plan update.
- Adopt a goose-control program (see “Broad Creek to the Chesapeake” report).
- Clean up contaminated sites that are targets of acquisition by the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation.
- Adopt landscaping and design standards that protect both the historic character of the area and water quality (also mentioned in Categories 1 and 2).



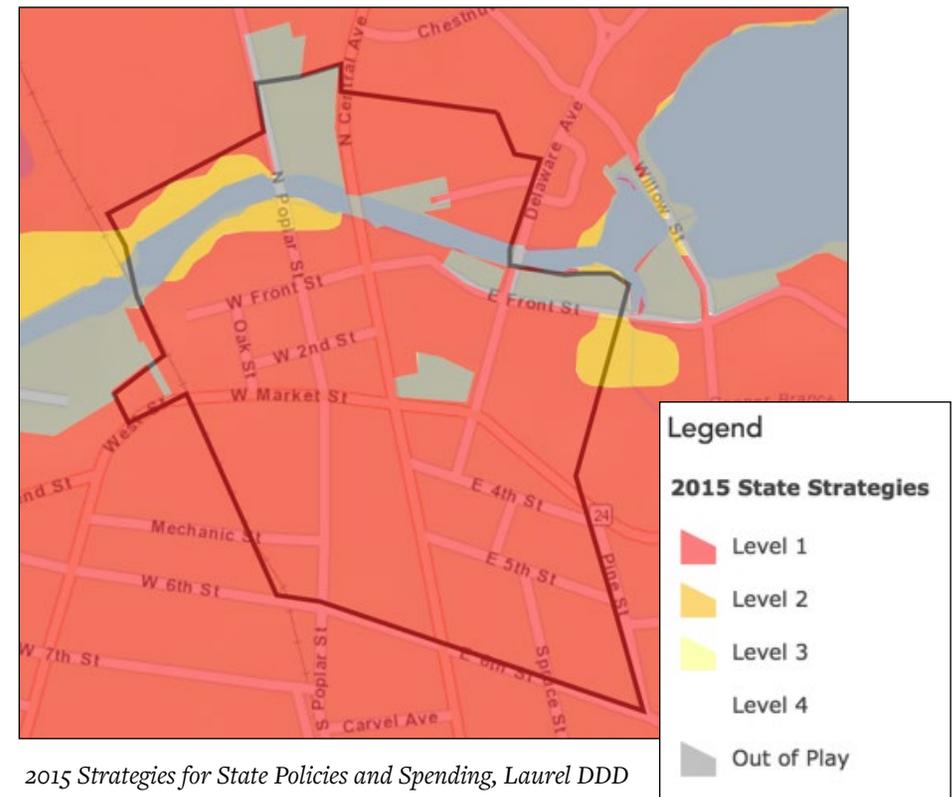
*A Canada goose can produce 1.5 pounds of feces a day, creating health, safety and water quality concerns.*

## Compatibility with State Strategies

The Downtown Development District Plan is compatible with the 2015 [Strategies for State Policies and Spending](#). As shown below, the area is almost all Level 1, a mixed-use and denser development area within a municipality.

Riparian areas on either side of Broad Creek are mapped as either Level 2 or Out of Play.

All of the recommendations within this plan will correspond with the state’s investment strategies for Level 1 while protecting the riparian corridors and parkland that is mapped as Level 2.



2015 Strategies for State Policies and Spending, Laurel DDD



# The perks.

## Proposed incentives for the DDD

The town and Laurel Redevelopment Corporation have teamed up to provide a robust menu of incentives designed to attract quality commercial development and improve the condition of housing and quality of life for residents.

Despite being maxed out on debt and hungry for new revenue, town leaders recognize the promise of a Downtown Development District in Laurel. Unique among small towns in Delaware, the LRC provides a means of offering incentives that would otherwise be unavailable to a town of Laurel's size and financial challenges.

Those incentives are described in tables on pages 19-20. Among the principal incentives:

- No town property taxes on commercial improvements for five years.
- A minimum discount of 25 percent on available land owned by the LRC for commercial projects, including the proposed cottages.
- A graduated reduction in the town's sewer and water impact fees based on the number of Equivalent Dwelling Units (EDUs).
- The comprehensive community improvement program to rehabilitate residential structures within the DDD—a partnership with the USDA Rural Development and several nonprofits (described on pages 13-14).
- A vacant lot on Market Street, in the commercial district, that the town owns and will deed to an appropriate enterprise that furthers Laurel's economic development goals.
- Purchase and cleanup of strategic parcels within The Ramble redevelopment area. One is a certified brownfield, and the other adjacent lot will be appended to the existing brownfield.
- Social media training for businesses within the DDD to learn how to reach people and organizations involved in nature and heritage tourism, kayaking, birding, cycling, etc.

Other up-front costs already managed by the LRC include a Phase One environmental assessment of the entire Ramble area and a feasibility study that recommends specific green stormwater practices throughout The Ramble.



*Top, looking west along Market Street in Laurel downtown. Above, Dr. Jules Bruck's rendering of the cottages planned for The Ramble.*



## Proposed incentives within Laurel Downtown Development District

Incentive	Description	Comment	Source
<b>Community improvement: Housing rehabilitation, rental and owner occupied (see link)</b>	Targeted one-stop, no-wrong-door program to rehab homes and promote home ownership within DDD	Addresses critical issue within DDD - coordinate with USDA, DSHA and various nonprofits to fund loans and grants for owner-occupied and rental properties	LRC, Sussex County Habitat for Humanity, USDA Rural Development, NCALL, Historic Tax Credit, Town, SEU Energy Credit
<b>Community improvement program creation, development and marketing (one-time cost)</b>	Position that will create and launch the above program, conducting initial outreach	This program will involve loans and grants from many different sources, with different qualifying incomes. This position would develop, coordinate and market the program	\$12,900 (estimate)  LRC board has approved funding contingent on DDD designation (one time, this person would create and implement a program that could be handed off to town, LRC, nonprofits)
<b>Discounted land/ leases on parcels owned by Laurel Redevelopment Corporation</b>	A minimum 25 percent discount on land owned by Laurel Redevelopment Corporation, including waterfront	Will help attract targeted development to DDD area, reduce risk of redevelopment	LRC board has approved contingent on DDD designation. Parcels identified and displayed on interactive map.
<b>Purchase and cleanup of key strategic sites within Ramble</b>	LRC has identified at least two sites (one a certified brownfield, the other a former town dump underneath wetlands) that it intends to purchase and clean up.	Brownfield cleanup funds not available to current landowners.  Acquiring these sites and cleanup would make them available to commercial enterprises within DDD	Phase I environmental study completed for \$50,000 along the entire Ramble, another cost savings for future developers.  Funds from LRC, NCALL, Bond Bill, DNREC

Incentive	Description	Comment	Source
<b>Building lot(s)</b>	Free lot to business that meets commercial development goals within DDD	Town will donate lot on Market Street to business that meets DDD goals	Town Council approval contingent on DDD designation
<b>Project Pop-Up</b>	Free short-term commercial space within DDD	The LRC participated in this program in 2015 and intends to continue the commitment	LRC, DEDO
<b>Sewer/water connection and impact fees</b>	Waive or reduce these fees within DDD - \$7,000 per EDU combined water/sewer impact fees	These are high relative to most Delaware municipalities - significant up-front cost that will be a barrier	Town Council to approve graduated fee reduction based on number of EDUs contingent on DDD designation  1-3 EDUs: 40% 4-7 EDUs: 50% 8 or more EDUs: 60%
<b>Property tax abatement on improvements</b>	Town will waive property taxes for a period of five years on the value of improvements	Will provide another incentive for commercial redevelopment	Town Council approval contingent on DDD designation
<b>Business technical assistance</b>	Social media training focused on the nature and heritage tourism industry	Many local businesses, including potential B&Bs, are unfamiliar with social media and how to reach potential nature and heritage tourists	LRC will issue request for proposals contingent on DDD designation
<b>Install nature-based playground and trail network within Ramble</b>	Installed infrastructure and amenity for developer/builder and community	Trail network would be a valuable amenity for current and new residents, as well as visitors	Town, LRC, Bond Bill, DNREC, Community Transportation Fund  (Funding not ID'd yet)



Incentive	Description	Comment	Source
<b>Facade improvement</b>	Improve commercial building appearance along Market Street	Only 6-8 facades - architectural consult and actual matching funds or loans for rehab	LRC, NCALL  (Funding source not identified yet)
<b>Green stormwater infrastructure</b>	Developer will not have to pay these costs (see chart below)	This is a major up-front cost that needs to be done right - LRC has paid for initial feasibility study for various sites along Ramble	DNREC, Bond Bill, Community Transportation Fund  Feasibility study paid for - \$75,000

If Laurel receives a Downtown Development District designation, the incentives will be loaded into an interactive Geographic Information Systems (GIS) application specifically geared toward local economic development, such as ESRI's [Live, Work, Locate](#) and/or [Incentive Zones](#) web applications.

Any resident or potential business will be able to click on a parcel and see what incentives are available for it, as well as other information about Laurel's DDD.



*This building and the wetland area behind it are within The Ramble footprint but not yet owned by the LRC.*

# The public.

## Engagement in The Ramble, DDD and comprehensive plan processes

Public engagement with a series of projects related to this Downtown Development District application date to the fall of 2012. The University of Delaware's Sustainable Coastal Communities Initiative, Office of State Planning Coordination, and DNREC staged a series of meetings with the town and stakeholders to propose a growth scenario that would be appropriate given Laurel's location within the Chesapeake Watershed.

A first public forum on the project that eventually became The Ramble was conducted in June 2013. Work continued with the town and the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation, and Dr. Jules Bruck of UD completed the initial Ramble design, which was unveiled at a public meeting in September 2014.

During 2015, the community was involved in efforts to bring The Ramble to life with a Fall Ramble event patterned after Better Block. The Better Block philosophy is to help the community envision the transformation of a blighted block or neighborhood by bringing a sampling of the planned amenities and uses to that area. During the summer of 2015, a diverse group of Laurel citizens and officials met almost weekly and helped plan the September 26 Fall Ramble event along the waterfront. The venue featured a temporary brewpub, food and baked goods, a farmer's market, Vanderwende's ice cream, kayaking and cycling, an art gallery, and other activities along The Ramble area.

### Nature-based tourism engagement

As mentioned earlier in this document, in response to the community's desire to add value to the economic development goals of The Ramble by attracting paddlers, cyclists, birders, and heritage tourists, the planning team secured a \$14,000 grant to support development of a nature-based and heritage tourism plan for Laurel. Delaware Sea Grant also contributed \$5,000 toward the implementation of the final plan.

A 1.5-day workshop was convened in November 2015 to seek input for this plan and was attended by a stakeholder group comprised of community leaders, tourism professionals, state resource planners, conservationists, and business



owners. The final plan was released during a spring 2016 event that celebrated Laurel's natural resources and ecotourism opportunities.

In March, the University's Sustainable Coastal Communities Initiative served as client contact for the Town of Laurel to organize and host a three-day community imaging design charrette conducted by Arnett Muldrow & Associates. The purpose was to create a consistent image package for Laurel and its partners to use to continue to build local pride, recruit investment to the community, and market the town to visitors. This was supported by an \$8,000 grant secured from the USDA and DEDO Downtown Delaware.

## Social media and website

To get the word out about initiatives such as The Ramble, Downtown Development District and comprehensive plan, Cedar Creek Sustainable Planners received \$3,000 from the Delaware Economic Development Office to build a colorful, non-governmental website, [www.reimaginel Laurel.net](http://www.reimaginel Laurel.net). The website includes a blog, videos, photos, discussion boards, presentations and an event calendar for activities related to Laurel's redevelopment. Cedar Creek also has built publicly accessible story maps via ArcGIS Online to highlight Laurel and the DDD.

A Reimagine Laurel [Facebook page](#) received more than 100 likes in 24 hours and now has more than 500 likes. A Reimagine Laurel [Twitter account](#) began Tweeting news about downtown Laurel and planning trends.

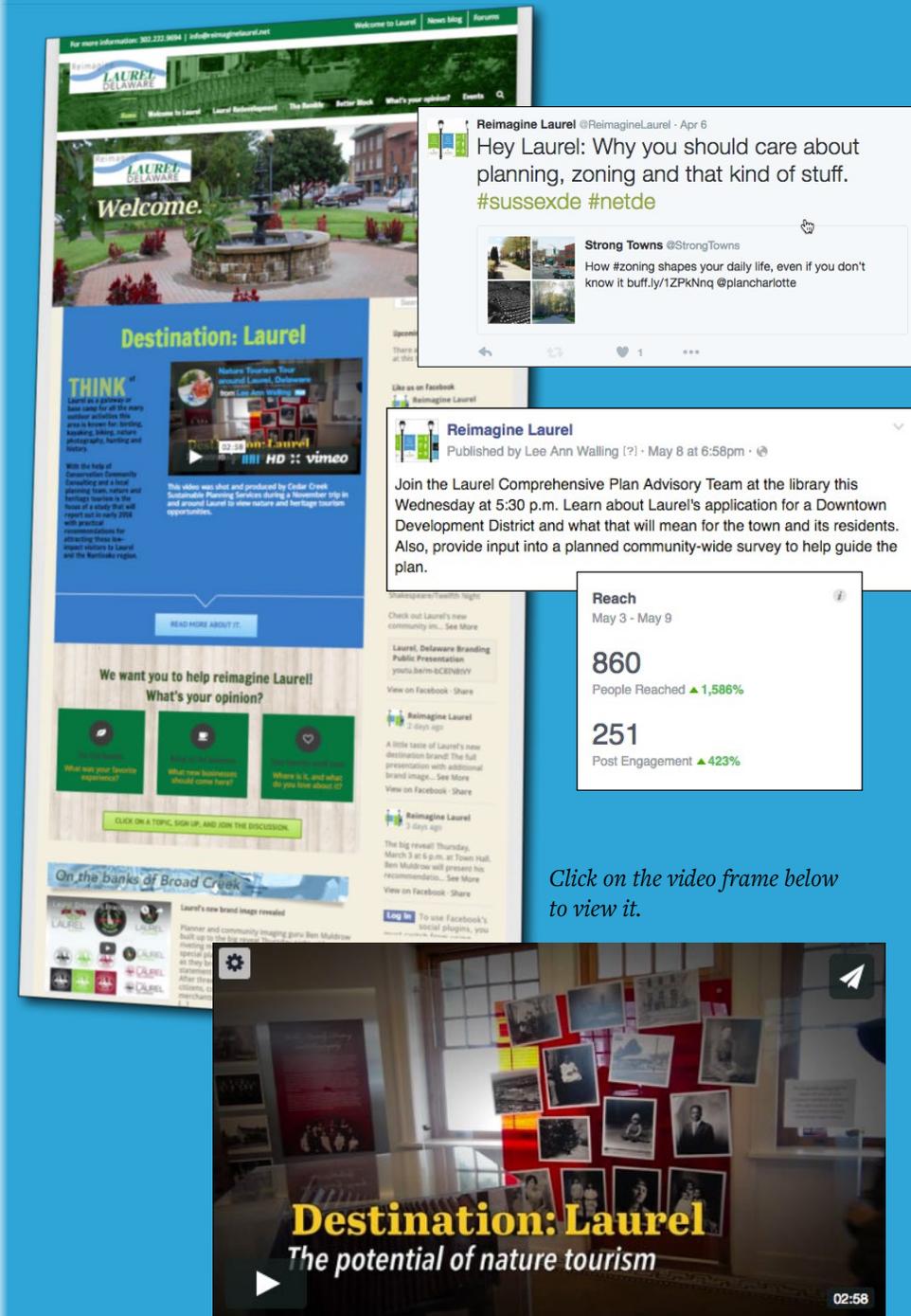
Outreach has included several visits to Laurel Chamber of Commerce meetings to discuss The Ramble and related projects.

In March 2016, Laurel Town Council appointed a Comprehensive Plan Advisory Team of citizens and business people to provide input to and feedback on the town's plan update. That group is meeting monthly and has heard presentations on Downtown Development District progress.

A community-wide online survey is scheduled for June to gather opinions on growth issues in Laurel. Information about the DDD will be included. Creative efforts to publicize the survey are expected to boost participation from throughout the town and greater community.

The public engagement process will continue into the fall with feedback from the survey being converted into guiding principles for Laurel's comprehensive plan. A video will be produced featuring residents talking about their experiences living in the Laurel community and what they value about it.

*Right, the Reimagine Laurel website and social media provide up-to-date information on redevelopment activities.*



*Click on the video frame below to view it.*



# Timeline

Laurel’s Town Council has reviewed this timeline and believes it is reasonable. The council and Laurel Redevelopment Corporation board of directors have agreed to provide the incentives for which they are responsible (*see resolution and support letters*).

This district plan contains many specific recommendations that will be fed into the comprehensive planning process, during which some of these recommendations may be refined. It is important for the town’s citizens, business owners and other stakeholders to have meaningful input into the comprehensive plan, including this very important element of it.

## Capacity for implementation

The town’s leadership has discussed and believes it has the capacity to implement the district plan. The consultant preparing the DDD application and comprehensive plan also will be developing the proposed community improvement program and will be available into 2017 to provide implementation assistance.

A high-level staff person has been identified to manage the community improvement program once developed. Officials involved in the town’s budget also are considering the creation of a position to shepherd plans and activities related to the DDD and economic development.

The LRC will be pursuing land acquisition and site cleanup. It retained Dr. Jules Bruck to continue with The Ramble site design. A paid UD intern working under Dr. Bruck and the consultant will develop design standards for the DDD.

Also, UD’s Sustainable Coastal Communities Initiative and Delaware Sea Grant remain committed to providing continuing leadership on projects and activities that support Laurel’s community redevelopment efforts.

Proposed timeline after DDD designation	
60 days	Council adopts incentives
90 days	Funding secured for green infrastructure, property acquisition, facade improvements and other community lending projects
120 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ LRC pursues parcel acquisition and cleanup</li> <li>➤ Comprehensive rehab program is launched</li> <li>➤ Zoning changes, design standards recommended via comprehensive plan process.</li> </ul>
180 days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Comprehensive plan adopted with DDD district plan included</li> <li>➤ Zoning code updates begin</li> </ul>

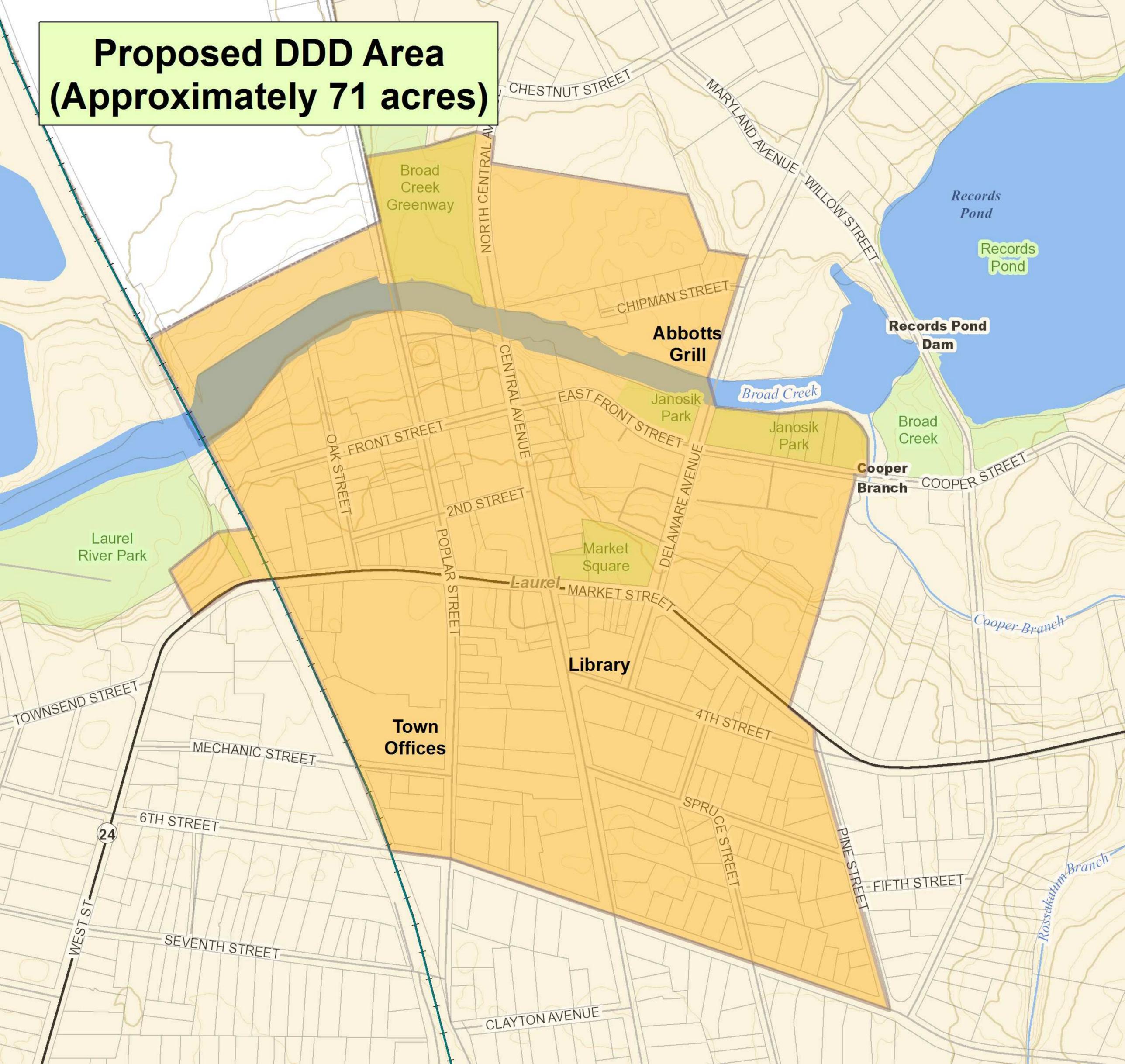
## Acknowledgements



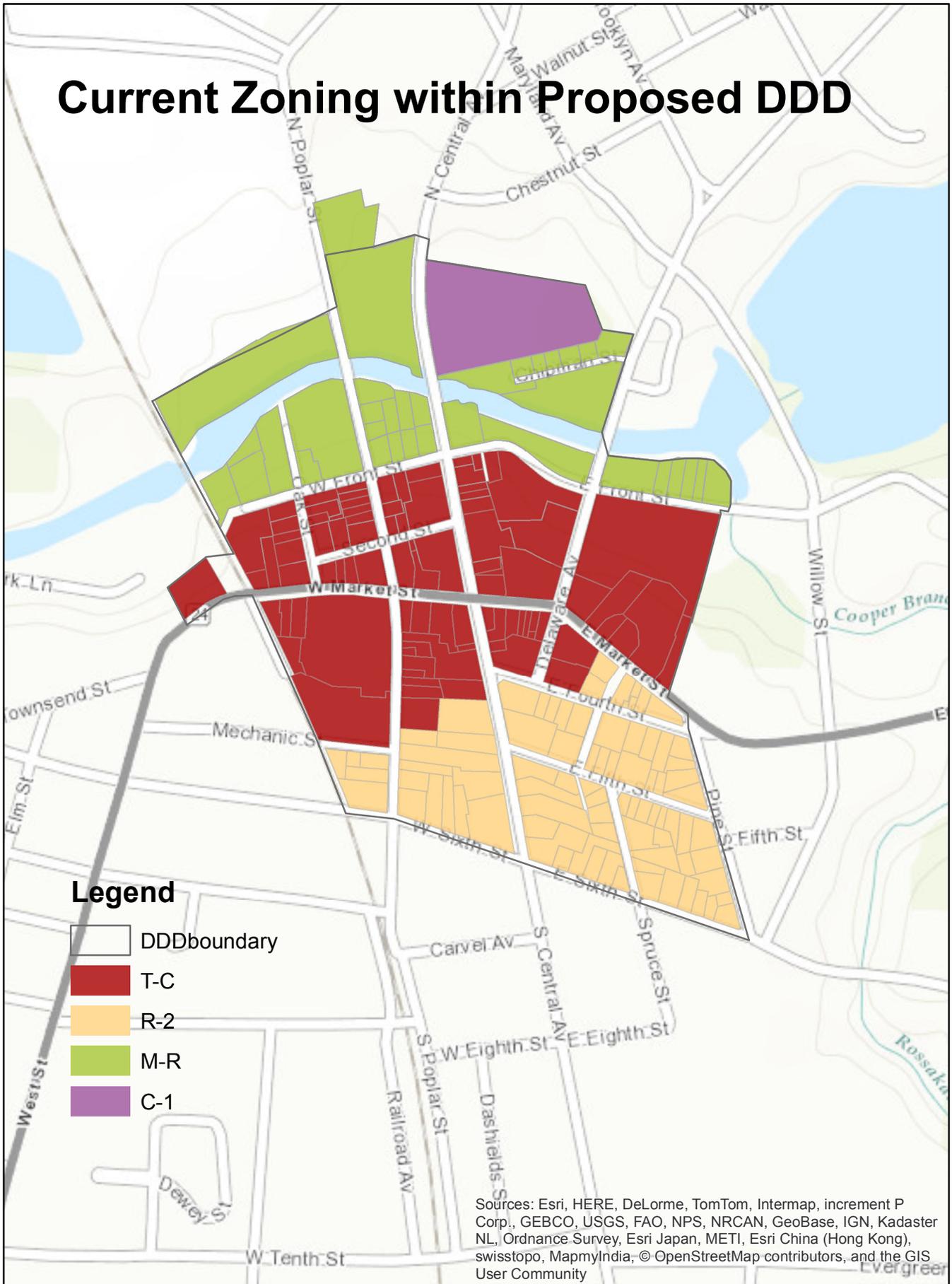
**Cedar Creek**   
Sustainable Planning Services



# Proposed DDD Area (Approximately 71 acres)

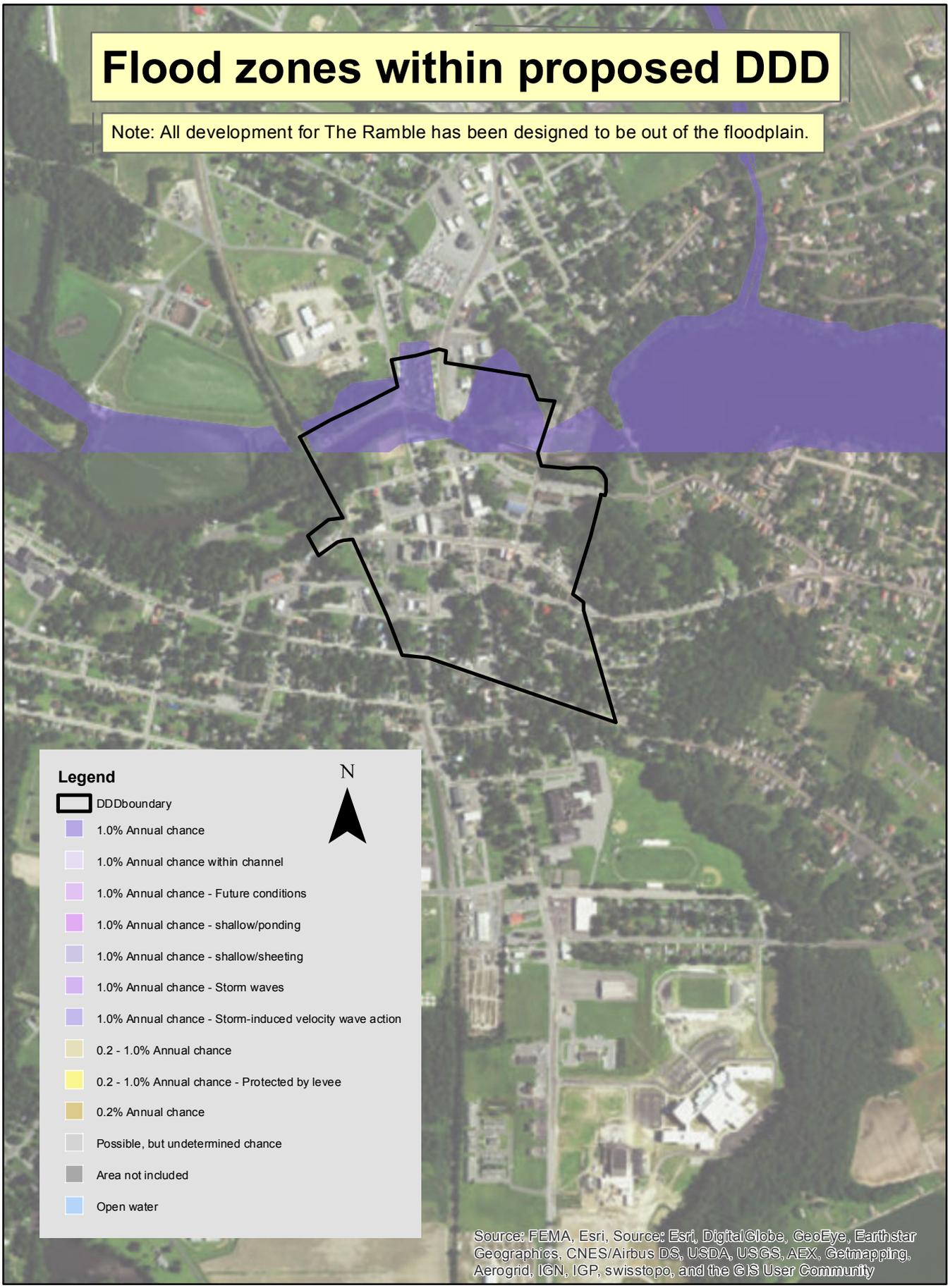


# Current Zoning within Proposed DDD



# Flood zones within proposed DDD

Note: All development for The Ramble has been designed to be out of the floodplain.



## Legend

-  DDD boundary
-  1.0% Annual chance
-  1.0% Annual chance within channel
-  1.0% Annual chance - Future conditions
-  1.0% Annual chance - shallow/ponding
-  1.0% Annual chance - shallow/sheeting
-  1.0% Annual chance - Storm waves
-  1.0% Annual chance - Storm-induced velocity wave action
-  0.2 - 1.0% Annual chance
-  0.2 - 1.0% Annual chance - Protected by levee
-  0.2% Annual chance
-  Possible, but undetermined chance
-  Area not included
-  Open water



Source: FEMA, Esri, Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AEX, Getmapping, Aerogrid, IGN, IGP, swisstopo, and the GIS User Community

# Town of Laurel

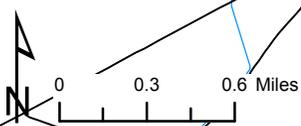
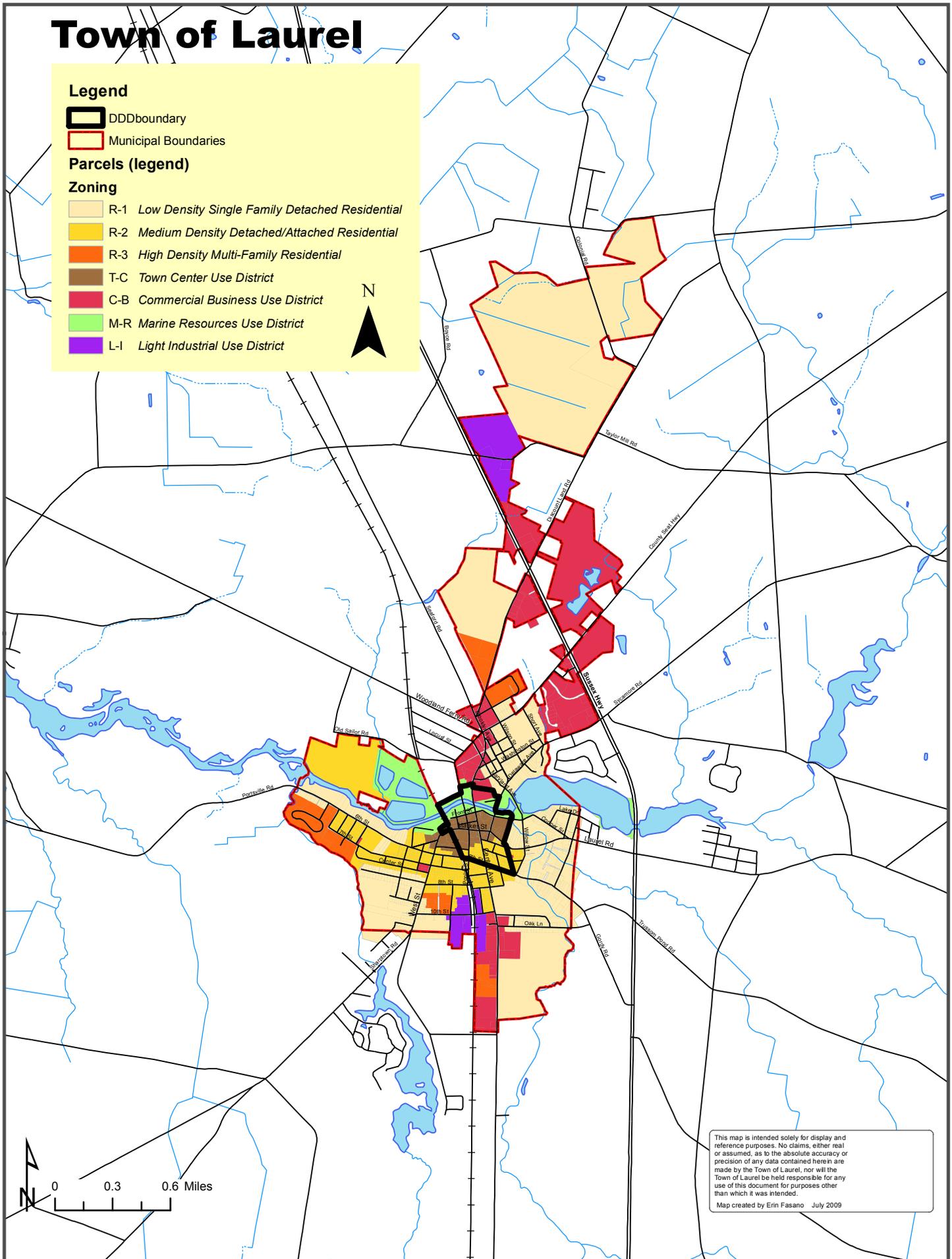
## Legend

-  DDDboundary
-  Municipal Boundaries

## Parcels (legend)

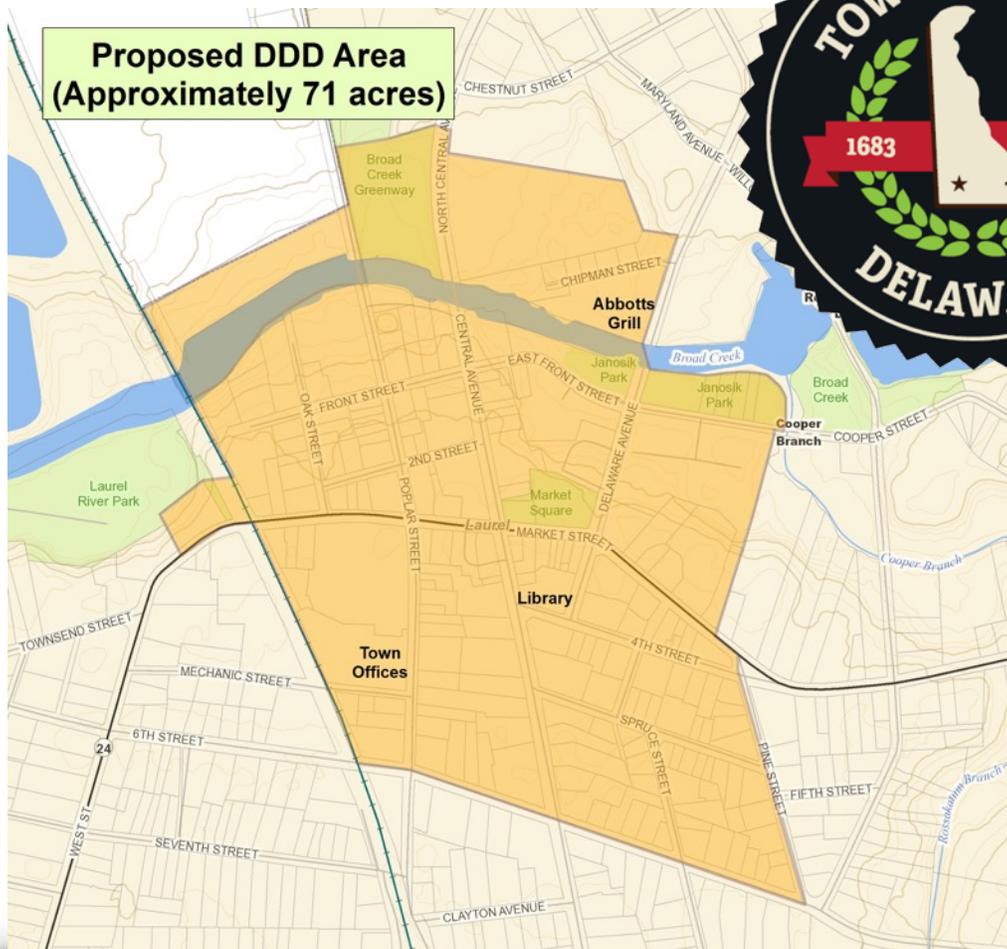
### Zoning

-  R-1 *Low Density Single Family Detached Residential*
-  R-2 *Medium Density Detached/Attached Residential*
-  R-3 *High Density Multi-Family Residential*
-  T-C *Town Center Use District*
-  C-B *Commercial Business Use District*
-  M-R *Marine Resources Use District*
-  L-I *Light Industrial Use District*



This map is intended solely for display and reference purposes. No claims, either real or assumed, as to the absolute accuracy or precision of any data contained herein are made by the Town of Laurel, nor will the Town of Laurel be held responsible for any use of this document for purposes other than which it was intended.  
 Map created by Erin Fasano July 2009

# A Comprehensive Housing Rehabilitation and Home Ownership Program within Laurel's Proposed Downtown Development District



## Introduction

Laurel is applying to be designated a Downtown Development District. The proposed district includes 71 acres (see map on cover page). The area includes the Broad Creek waterfront, the Ramble mixed-use redevelopment project, the Market Street commercial area, and approximately 81 housing structures.

The homes range from large owner-occupied Victorians to multi-unit rentals. About 50 percent of the structures are rentals. There are approximately 10 vacant structures, including large residences abandoned by older residents who can no longer maintain them.

Laurel's building inspectors developed a 1-5 condition rating for the structures within the DDD. It is clear from the age and condition of many of these homes that any effort to redevelop Laurel's central core must include a rehabilitation initiative along with any commercial redevelopment efforts. One third of Laurel's housing stock was built before 1939, compared to 9.1 percent for Delaware.

Laurel has a low Median Household Income — at \$33,387, it is 55 percent of Delaware's MHI. According to the 2010-2014 American Community Survey, almost one fourth of the town's families are below the poverty level, vs. 8.2 percent for Delaware. Almost half of the town's residents are paying more than 30 percent of their incomes for housing-related costs.

The proposed district is built out, except for a few commercial parcels - including one where market-rate cottages are planned - and the Delaware State Housing Authority has indicated the Town has its "fair share" of subsidized housing. So Laurel is interested in rehabilitation of existing homes and promoting home ownership.

Laurel Housing Statistics		
Category	Laurel	Delaware
Built 1939 or earlier	33.3%	9.1%
Renter-occupied	43.9%	28.4%
Median home value	\$131,300	\$232,900
Paying more than 30% on housing costs	49.1%	33.4%

*Source: 2010-2014 American Community Survey (US Census)*

Laurel Income Statistics		
Category	Laurel	Delaware
Median Household Income	\$33,387	\$60,231
% of families/people below poverty level	24.7%	8.2%
% receiving food stamps	42.6%	12.7%
% unemployed	10.2%	8.5%

Source: 2010-2014 American Community Survey (US Census)

**Priority focus areas:**

- Priority One** would be the area south of the Ramble revitalization area and west of Central Avenue. This is a mixture of 21 smaller rental (16) and owner-occupied properties adjacent to properties that retain an industrial character, including a certified brownfield.

These homes are located in Laurel’s “Town Center” zoning district. It is a mixed-use district “that is utilized for an intensive and traditional mixture of small-scale retail, cultural, conference and meeting, lodging, business, personal service, financial,



*Priority #1 includes 21 residential structures, 16 of them rentals.*



institutional, office, residential and governmental uses,” according to Laurel’s zoning code.

This priority area, like the others, is located within Laurel’s Historic District. Any adaptive reuse or replacement of these buildings should follow proposed guidelines for architectural design and landscaping.

This area is west of Central Avenue, which is a part of Laurel that has been targeted by Sussex County Habitat for Humanity.

- 2. Priority Two** would be the larger homes, many of them Victorian, along the main routes of Central Avenue and Market Street. This area also includes Laurel’s commercial district. Most likely, many of these residents would require access to programs that are not based on income.
- 3. Priority Three** would be the rest of the residential structures within the proposed DDD.

### Potential program partners

To address housing concerns within the proposed Downtown Development District, the Town and the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation will offer a comprehensive rehabilitation/home ownership program. The Town and LRC have met with USDA Rural Development, Sussex County Habitat for Humanity, Delaware State Housing Authority and NCALL on April 19, 2016 to discuss such a program and the potential to leverage different sources of assistance, such as:

## **USDA**

[Section 504 Home Repair Program](#)

[Section 502 Direct Loan Program](#)

[Single Family Housing Guaranteed Loan Program](#)

## **Sussex County Habitat for Humanity**

[Home repairs](#)

Habitat currently has \$100,000 available for repairs west of Central Avenue in Laurel. There is an opportunity to leverage the Habitat program with the USDA Home Repair program. This has not been done in Delaware to date. The map shows a targeted area located just south of the Ramble waterfront development project that would be a strategic neighborhood to focus a rehab program.

USDA and Habitat represent the most immediately available assistance. Other sources are:

## **Delaware State Housing Authority**

Housing Development Fund - partner with housing nonprofit such as Habitat

Strong Neighborhoods Fund - available fall 2016 - could address vacant properties within the DDD. According to the Town's Inspections Department, there are 10 vacant homes within the proposed DDD.

DSHA also offers [home-buying assistance](#) via a Second Mortgage Assistance Loan (SMAL) to provide closing costs and down payment assistance; a state First-Time Homebuyer Tax Credit; and below-market interest rates for home loans.

## **Department of State**

[Historic Tax Credit](#) - available to residents who do not meet income requirements for other programs. All housing within the proposed DDD is also within Laurel's Historic District.

## **Energize Delaware**

Persons living within a designated DDD are eligible for a free energy audit and rebates up to \$9,100 for energy efficiency improvements under the Sustainable Energy Utility's [DDD program](#).

## **Department of Education**

Possible collaboration with [Delaware Talent Cooperative](#), which offers incentives for teaching at designated schools, including Laurel Intermediate Middle School. The program offers 50 basis points off mortgages for teachers locating in these areas, and there is a possibility of formalizing a Live Near Your Work program that includes other incentives (such as Historic Tax Credit and Sustainable Energy Utility.)

## **NCALL**

Short-term lending to the Town and/or nonprofits for neighborhood revitalization, commercial and residential - can provide revolving [loan funds](#) and bridge loans, as well as funds for acquisition and construction.

## **DNREC**

[Weatherization](#), if performed in combination with more significant home rehabilitation, would complement the DDD initiative.

## **Sussex County**

Over the last 15 years, Sussex County's Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program has spent \$969,144 to rehabilitate 78 properties within Laurel. According to the program, 25 homes in Laurel are on a waiting list, although the county does not know exactly how much it will receive this fiscal year for projects in Laurel. Coordination with other programs in priority areas would help leverage available dollars.

## **Design and implementation of program**

The good news is there is no need to reinvent the wheel with respect to offering assistance to residents within the DDD. However, each program has different eligibilities — e.g., income, owner-occupied vs. rental, grant vs. loan, etc. Even homeowners with means who wish to restore their large homes are unaware of programs such as Delaware's Historic Tax Credit.

The intent is to design a no-wrong-door program specifically for Laurel's Downtown Development District that can be handed off to the town, Laurel Redevelopment Corporation and relevant nonprofit and faith-based organizations. The program would develop creative and effective mechanisms for marketing and accessing services.

The DDD area is small enough that information could be circulated door to door, including in Spanish, and one-on-one services could be provided, tailored to the income and status of residents.

It is estimated that such a program would cost \$12-13,000 to develop and would include a detailed survey of and data collection within the priority areas, devising easy access to the array of programs, and outreach via online and straightforward marketing materials.

**Note:** The Laurel Redevelopment Corporation has agreed to fund this position.

The program should have a succinct name.

## Role of the program developer/coordinator

- Secure community agreement on a name for the program
- Further assess the condition of rental and owner-occupied housing, including vacant properties, within Laurel’s Downtown Development District.
- Coordinate with all participating nonprofit programs to design a program that is easy for a variety of residents to access and participate in
- Apply for additional funding, such as NCALL and the Strong Neighborhoods Housing Fund (DSHA) to address related problems such as vacant and commercial properties
- Communicate in various ways, including door to door, with residents, homeowners and landlords within DDD
- Develop web portal for the program
- Develop informational and promotional materials, including in Spanish
- Work with the Town to identify a permanent “home” for the program and hand it off

Task	Who	Estimated time
Name program	Community effort	5 hours
Conduct more detailed assessment of housing conditions	Coordinator and participating programs	30 hours
Coordinate Laurel DDD effort with participating federal, state and nonprofit programs	Coordinator and participating programs	40 hours
Identify and apply for additional grant funding	Coordinator and town	20 hours
Develop web portal	Coordinator	35 hours
Develop marketing materials	Coordinator	25 hours
Launch program	All partners	10 hours
Initial communications with property owners	Coordinator, partners including town	25 hours
Follow up and troubleshooting	All partners	25 hours
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>215</b>

## Downtown Development District Application

Census Data Spreadsheet Template

### Town of Laurel/Sussex County

		518.02	BG1	BG2	
	DDD*	Town	Tract(s)	Block(s)	Block(s)
Total Population	352	3816	4337	2918	1419
Median Household Income	\$43,294	\$33,387	\$39,428		
Poverty Rate, All People	13.3%	24.7	23.0		
% Housing Built 1949 or earlier	38.5	38.5	39.5		
% Homeownership	62.7	56.1	67.4	61.3	79.3
% Rental	37.3	43.9	32.6	38.7	20.7
% Vacant Housing Units	20.7	11.3	8.6	12.8	15.5
Median Home Value	\$151,786	\$131,300	\$148,600		
% Low / Mod Income		50%	43.5%	43.3%	44.1%

\*Information for DDD is from ESRI Community Analyst, 2009-2013 American Community Survey estimate. Reliability of data within this polygon is considered low.

Remaining data from 2010-2014 American Community Survey

% Low/Moderate Income from HUD Exchange

Note: Within the proposed DDD, there are no residents or dwellings within Census Tract 518

Census Tract (s) that include proposed District:						
518.02						
518.01						

Census Blocks that most closely correspond to proposed District:						
518.021						
518.022						
518.012						

Census Tract Worksheet

	<b>518.02</b>
Total Population	3431
Median Income	\$39,428
Poverty Rate	15.3
Age of Structures	39.5 % built 1949 or earlier
% Homeownership	67.4
% Rental	32.6
Vacancy	8.6
Median Home Value	\$148,600
% Low / Mod Income	43.5%

Census Block Worksheet

	<b>518.02</b>		
	<b>Block #1</b>	<b>Block #2</b>	<b>Totals</b>
Total Population	2918	1419	4337
Housing Units Owned	617	414	1031
Housing Units Rented	390	108	498
Housing Units Occupied	842	667	1509
Housing Units Vacant	124	122	246

Laurel Ministerial Association  
600 South Central Avenue  
Laurel, DE 19956

May 19, 2016

Ms. Jamie Smith  
Town Manager  
201 Mechanic St.  
Laurel DE 19956

Dear Ms. Smith:

The Laurel Ministerial Association supports the town's efforts to improve our community by seeking designation as a Downtown Development District. We understand that so many of our residents are struggling and that the town is struggling to serve them.

We believe the Downtown Development District will focus resources and efforts to bring investment, jobs and people to strengthen our town. In particular, we are hopeful the comprehensive housing rehabilitation and home ownership program will improve the lives of our residents and encourage new residents to call Laurel their home.

We commend the town for seeking this designation, hope you are successful, and look forward to working with you to make Laurel a stronger community.

I submit this letter on behalf of the Laurel Ministerial Association which approved these efforts at our meeting on Wednesday, May 18, 2016.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Howard G. Backus". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "H" and a cross at the end of the last name.

The Rev. Dr. Howard G. Backus, President  
Laurel Ministerial Association



May 11, 2016

Jamie Smith  
Town Manager  
201 Mechanic Street  
Laurel, DE 19956

Dear Ms. Smith:

As a local community development and affordable housing organization, Sussex County Habitat for Humanity supports Laurel's application for Downtown Development District (DDD) designation.

We believe in homeownership and have been a long term partnership with the Town in developing affordable housing. We have made significant investments in the Town, and together have already provided affordable homeownership opportunities to 12 families.

I applaud the vision of the team that is putting together this application, and have appreciated working together with USDA and other housing and economic development stakeholders to see how we can make homeownership affordable and accessible in the town. Additionally, with the unique situation in Laurel of an aging housing stock, we look forward to continuing our work to do owner occupied home improvements in the town and specifically seeing how to leverage our resources with others in the proposed DDD.

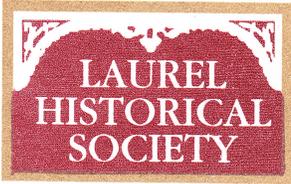
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kevin J. Gilmore".

Kevin J. Gilmore  
Executive Director

Board of Directors:  
Anthony Del Franco  
Kathy Goodman  
Scott Lanham  
Mary Ann Leager  
Ed Lewandowski  
Richard Legatski  
Chad Lingenfelder  
Bob McVey  
Mike Nally  
Megan Neal  
David Pedersen  
Patricia Pfarrer  
Lloyd Richter  
Larry Rohlfing  
Bruce Wright

Building strength, stability and self-reliance.  
P.O. Box 759 Georgetown, DE 19947  
Phone: (302)855-1153 - Fax: (302)855-9262  
[www.sussexcountyhabitat.org](http://www.sussexcountyhabitat.org)



P.O. Box 102 • Laurel, Delaware 19956

May 23, 2016

Ms. Jamie Smith

Town Manager

201 Mechanic St.

Laurel DE 19956

Dear Ms. Smith:

The Laurel Historical Society enthusiastically endorses the town's Downtown Development District application.

We believe that such an honor and designation will help focus attention on Laurel's history and historic homes. Especially with the town's intention to create a home rehabilitation program that will serve all residents within the DDD, we believe there will be a great opportunity to restore many of our significant historic properties.

We stand ready to help the town realize its vision for the Downtown Development District and wish you success in your application.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Edward L. Fowler". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Edward L. Fowler

President

 **LAUREL REDEVELOPMENT CORPORATION**  
P.O. Box 333, Laurel, DE 19956 *Invest in Laurel*

May 16, 2016

Ms. Jamie Smith  
Laurel, DE Town Manager  
201 Mechanic Street  
Laurel, DE 19956

Dear Jamie,

The Laurel Redevelopment Corporation intends to play a key role in implementation of the town's Downtown Development District and completely supports the town's application.

The LRC has a 30-year history of investment in and redevelopment of Laurel. Together with the town, the LRC owns about 95 percent of the waterfront parcels that will become The Ramble. We have also been involved in the clearing of blighted areas, creation of new town parks, construction of upscale waterfront villas, and the stabilization of the Broad Creek shoreline.

If Laurel is designated a Downtown Development District, the LRC board has agreed to a minimum discount of 25 percent off the appraised value of land it owns within the DDD area. The LRC also intends to pursue the purchase and remediation of strategic parcels within The Ramble footprint.

In addition, the LRC has agreed to fund the coordinator position that will develop the Community Improvement program outlined in the DDD application. That person will work with federal, state and nonprofit partners, as well as the town, to create a seamless program for rehabilitation of residential and commercial properties. That position also will develop marketing materials, social media and conduct initial outreach before handing off the program to the town. The LRC will allocate up to \$13,000 for the position.

The LRC also has agreed to contract for social media training that will help businesses within the DDD reach out to nature and heritage tourism enthusiasts and related organizations.

The LRC believes that, with its application, plan and proposed incentives, the Town of Laurel is the best prepared and positioned community in Sussex County for a DDD designation.

If you need anything further or If I can be of assistance in any way, please call me.

Sincerely,

*Brian G Shannon*

Property Manager  
Laurel Redevelopment Corporation



May 18, 2016

Lee Ann Walling, Principal  
Cedar Creek Sustainable Planning Services  
c/o Town of Laurel  
201 Mechanic Street  
Laurel, DE 19956

Re: Support for the Town of Laurel's Downtown Development District Application

Dear Ms. Walling:

Please accept this letter as our interest from the NCALL Loan Fund to support your plans described in the Downtown Development District (DDD) application. With designation from DSHA as a District, the Town of Laurel will have access to a number of incentives and financial tools to assist in the revitalization efforts you already have underway. It was great to see Laurel's efforts honored at the Delaware Downtown Development conference just a few months ago. DSHA will be excited to work with Laurel regarding downtown revitalization since you have already shown what you can do, and the proposals for building on that foundation are more likely to succeed in a short period of time with DDD recognition.

We understand that Laurel has many assets to work with including volunteers, nonprofit organizations, the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation and seasoned consultants to make sure the Laurel story is being told. Now, with the DDD designation hopefully, the Town will build on the progress to date, and accelerate the development and revitalization goals. We hope the NCALL Loan Fund will be an additional asset for the Town. In your DSHA application, the defined DDD area encompasses the downtown and some adjacent neighborhoods with housing in need of revitalization. There is a cohesive plan that combines business attraction and retention along with the rehabilitation of the surrounding housing stock for homeownership.

As a Community Development Financial Institution, we are committed to working with nonprofits, developers and government agencies to support, in this case, neighborhood revitalization. Currently we see roles of our CDFI to provide flexible, revolving lines of credit, and possible development loans within the Town of Laurel. One (line of credit) may be focused on landbanking and redevelopment of the commercial properties in the downtown area. The other would be for developers to buy, renovate and then sell the housing, consistent with the Town's revitalization strategy as outlined in the DDD application. Also, as a CDFI, we are able to provide technical assistance to the Town and its goals, if requested, in the area of financial

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packaging and leveraging of private sector resources, capital campaign planning for select facilities, and overall strategic planning for the financing goals standpoints. We are already financially engaged with several projects in both the Dover and Wilmington DDD areas. In addition to providing project-based financing, we also bridge finance the commitments issued by DSHA for projects in those DDDs.

I hope this letter is of use to you and your application. In the meantime, I will follow up with the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation regarding financing opportunities within Laurel's Downtown Development District. Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance with your DDD application. Good luck!

Sincerely,



Karen Kollias  
Loan Fund Director





United States Department of Agriculture

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Rural Development

April 28, 2016

State Office

1221 College Park  
Drive, Suite 200  
Dover, DE 19904

Voice 302.857.3582  
Fax 855.389.2236

Jamie Smith  
Town Manager  
201 Mechanic Street  
Laurel, DE 19956

Dear Ms. Smith:

Safe, affordable housing is a core mission of USDA Rural Development. We work alongside numerous housing partners including Sussex County Habitat for Humanity to make this happen. We strongly support the Laurel Downtown Development District project as an excellent demonstration of focusing multiple resources on a significant community issue.

USDA Rural Development single family housing programs include ownership, with both a direct or guaranteed mortgage; and, repair that may be a grant, loan or combo.

We look forward to working with all partners in this endeavor.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "William A. McGowan", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

William A. McGowan, Ed.D  
State Director

cc: Brad King, SFH Program Director

*Greater Laurel Chamber of Commerce*



Leadership since 1917

Date: May 16,

Jamie Smith  
Town Manager

Dear Jamie:

The Laurel Chamber of Commerce is an active partner with the Town and the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation in growing the economic vitality of Laurel. We have a long history of involvement in strategic efforts to grow businesses here and attract jobs, residents and visitors to Laurel. Current involvement in those efforts includes The Ramble waterfront development plan and the town's comprehensive plan.

We enthusiastically support the town's application to have a Downtown Development District that includes Laurel's central business district and the Broad Creek waterfront. Laurel has many of the same challenges as other small towns with once thriving downtowns, and we believe the DDD will help make the town a more attractive place to locate, invest and grow.

We hope you that the state's leaders will see the promise and preparation as clearly as we do, and select Laurel for a Downtown Development District.

Sincerely,

***Don Dykes***

Don Dykes  
Executive Director

Located at: 215 Mechanic St., P. O. Box 696, Laurel DE 19956

Phone (302) 875-9319

Visit us on the web @ [laurelchamber.com](http://laurelchamber.com)

E-mail us at [info@laurelchamber.com](mailto:info@laurelchamber.com)