

Using the Downtown Laurel **DESIGN GUIDE**

Starting a downtown rehabilitation or restoration project can be daunting. We recommend that all property owners begin with a little planning using the advice in this short document. The Town of Laurel Town Manager as well as the Town of Laurel Building Code official can provide suggestions to you as you begin to think about making improvements to your downtown building.



Step 1 Evaluate your building's appearance.

It is important to take a good look at a building before proposing alterations to its exterior. Consider the windows, doors, and detailing. Note the entire façade, including the upper stories as well as the storefront. A successful improvement strategy is one that treats the whole building and does not neglect the upper floors. Remember that storefronts should be viewed as a part of an entire building. The goal is to use the historic character of your property, to create visually distinct facades and storefronts that relate to their surroundings and also provide a sense of cohesiveness in the commercial district without strict uniformity

Step 2 Evaluate your building's surroundings.

An elevated level of upkeep always strengthens the image of a commercial district. Sidewalk maintenance is the responsibility of the property owner whose property is immediately adjacent to it. The sidewalk should be kept free of weeds and debris, and windows should be washed regularly. Trash generated by the store should be kept in enclosed areas at the rear of the building and must be easily serviced by trash collection trucks.

Step 3 Find historic photographs

Determine if there are any historic photographs of your building. The Laurel Historical Society has an extensive historic photograph collection, and they might have a historic photo of your building. Contact the Laurel Historical Society through their website contact page www.laureldehistoricalsociety.org. Check with them before you begin planning your project, as an historic photograph might provide clues about the original colors and missing architectural features of your building's storefront, sign, awning, upper story, and cornice. Use any historic photo to plan your improvements. If you cannot find an historic photograph of your building, determine if historic photos of other, similar buildings to yours are available. The Laurel Historical Society can determine if they have photos of buildings similar to yours that you might be able to use to suggest how your property may have originally looked.



This mixed use commercial and residential use building at 124-126 East Market Street retains all the wooden upper story, one over one wooden windows. Its primary storefront retains its original bulkhead under the large glass storefront windows and the original transom above the glass. Illuminated signs like the open pictured that says open are permitted behind the storefront glass.



The Laurel Heritage Museum, located in the former train station, was beautifully restored. The entire building was painted, repointed, and a new roof installed.

Step 4 Get good advice

Contact the Building Code Official at Town Hall for advice before engaging architects, designers, contractors, sign, or awning manufacturers. Work with a qualified architect or contractor to plan and implement your project, using your building's historic character as a center for any new design. Your architect can provide good advice for phasing work and help you save money so that the building can continue to be used while you undergo construction. Contact the Laurel Code Enforcement Officer at Town Hall for advice before submitting any final plans for review, as he/she can help you navigate the Town's approval process.

Step 5 Make needed repairs; establish a maintenance schedule.

Preserve the value of your building by repairing any damage before undertaking any façade work. To prevent major building repairs in the future, a regular maintenance schedule should be established for addressing minor problems, such as painting, cleaning, and repairs. The following are recommended preventive maintenance steps:

- Check the roof to ensure that it is watertight. Clean gutters and downspouts twice a year.
- Scrape chipped and peeling paint and repaint as needed.
- Repoint and patch deteriorated masonry or stonework joints.
- Repair or replace weatherproofing agents.
- Repair cracked sidewalks and broken curbs as damage occurs, rather than waiting until larger repairs are needed.

Establish a regular inspection and maintenance routine for your building. The goal is to identify calendar months in which inspection and repairs will occur. The National Park Service's Preservation Brief #47 on Maintaining the Exterior of Small and Medium Size Historic Buildings by Sharon C. Park, FAIA is a practical guide for historic property owners who want general guidance on maintenance. It can be accessed at <http://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs/47-maintaining-exteriors.htm>.

Simple maintenance of storefronts and upper stories should be undertaken year-round, to enhance the value of historic properties. Regular, routine maintenance prevents larger problems over time, because routine maintenance is fundamentally a preservation activity.



The Bank of Delmarva is proud of its Classical Revival style historic building, which continues to be superbly maintained by its owner and remains a landmark in downtown Laurel.



The former post office, now used by Pivot Physical Therapy, at 400 South Central Avenue is in the Classical Revival style and is well maintained.



This Design Guide document for Laurel, DE was funded by Downtown Delaware through a grant from the US Department of Agriculture, Rural Development.