

The 2004 Greater Laurel Comprehensive Plan

II. Laurel's Location & Regional Framework

As the map entitled Laurel's Regional Framework illustrates, Laurel's location at the crossing of US Route 13 and the Broad Creek Greenway is regionally strategic in several ways:

Laurel is a Chesapeake Bay Community. As part of the ecology of the Nanticoke River Watershed, Laurel is a Chesapeake Bay community. Laurel served as an important home for the Nanticoke Indians in the 17th and 18th centuries and for hundreds of years before. Europeans came into the area during the late 17th century. The symbolic place of Laurel's origin, and an important natural place in its natural environment, is "The Wading Place" on Broad Creek. The Plan recommends that new attention be paid to rediscovering the community's Nanticoke River and Chesapeake Bay heritage. This should take the form of defining and interpreting the Broad Creek Greenway and developing a Greenway Trail connecting Trap Pond with the Nanticoke at Phillips Landing and Woodland Ferry. It will include redeveloping existing Lagoon #3 of the Wastewater Treatment Plant as a highly naturalistic small boat recreational harbor for boats moving back and forth between the Town and the Nanticoke River. It should also mean participation in the Chesapeake Bay Gateways and Water Trails Network program, bay-oriented special events and cooperative environmental activities.

Laurel is Part of a Cultural Path Between Two Bays. Culturally, Laurel and Broad Creek are part of a path between the Nanticoke River and Delaware Bay watersheds. When settlement occurred, families followed this pathway. It led originally from Northampton County on Virginia's Eastern Shore through Old Somerset and Dorchester Counties in Maryland and into Sussex County, where the Nanticoke River rises in streams in an arc from Melson in Wicomico County, Maryland to Harrington in Kent County, Delaware. This is a cultural entity that has potential for cooperative ventures, festivals and special events as well as exhibits and the founding of new museums.

Laurel is Within the Biologically Diverse Broad Creek Greenway Corridor. Laurel is the largest community within this bio-diverse sub-region of cypress swamps and white cedar stands of forest within the Nanticoke River watershed. This implies growing interest in, and attention to, natural resources.

Laurel Has High Accessibility. US Route 13 is the Main Street of western Delaware. Along 13, Laurel is equidistant from Seaford and Delmar, from Dover in Kent County and Salisbury in Wicomico County, Maryland and from Wilmington/Philadelphia and Norfolk. It is well located from the perspective of Delmarva travel, trade and tourism.

Fifteen Million People Live Within A 150-Mile Radius of Laurel. This is a two and one-half hour driving radius, and includes the Wilmington, Philadelphia, Baltimore,

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Washington DC and Norfolk metropolitan areas. An estimated 30% of this population consists of members of the Baby Boom generation born between 1946-64. The leading edge of this population is now approaching retirement age and has shown a preference for small-town living. It can be expected that Laurel will attract significant numbers of households from this demographic group over the 20-year time period of the Comprehensive Plan. It can be expected that they will bring heightened interest in heritage and eco-tourism as well as new business skills. It is also expected, and is now being experienced, that increasing numbers of immigrants from other countries will select Laurel as a location for living in future years.

Laurel Is Experiencing Demand For New Development. Laurel is located in the path of development pressures moving from Wilmington, Philadelphia and the New York/New Jersey Region in the north and from Salisbury in the south to the Delaware coast. This demand for new development is now moving west from the Delaware coast into Western Sussex County. These forces are now reaching Laurel. They can be either good or bad forces, depending on how they are planned for.

By virtue of its location, heritage and aspirations, Laurel will attract major interest in conservation and ecology, heritage and preservation and new growth and development during the coming decades.