

The 2004 Greater Laurel Comprehensive Plan

VI. THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN: GOALS, POLICIES & PROJECTS

The overriding purpose of having a Comprehensive Plan is to enable more good things to happen than could happen in any other way. By having and using a Comprehensive Plan, a community can maximize and leverage its limited resources. The Plan is long-term, 20 years in this case, because “patient” periods of time are required to combine and leverage resources. The creation of an economically mixed and viable Town Center is an example. It must be slowly pieced together based on trial and error. Developing design and activity patterns that can interconnect and interrelate the US Route 13 Business Boulevard with Laurel’s traditional Town Center is another.

A major planning and economic development challenge for Laurel is to reinstitute the practice and ideas of town planning after a 35-year gap. It is important that the Comprehensive Plan be the subject of community discussion and collaboration with county and state agencies. It is also highly important that the plan contain a vision that is adequate to the task after so long an interregnum.

Because implementing a Comprehensive Plan requires the contributions of hundreds if not thousands of people, it must contain a community vision that can be shared. The following vision statement has been prepared for the Greater Laurel Comprehensive Plan:

A. A Vision of A Laurel of Delaware

Named for a flowering plant that has symbolized achievement since antiquity, Laurel will be a Garden City of southern Delaware. It will build on its deep roots in agriculture. It will develop the quality of its municipal services for citizens, taxpayers, neighbors, businesses and visitors. It will grow in new ways. It will honor its character as a family town and its heritage as the capital of the Broad Creek Greenway. Its rich relationship with its farming countryside will be protected by a surrounding Greenbelt. Its legacy as a Town founded in the Nanticoke River Watershed will be honored. Its connection to Route 13 as a business boulevard will be realized. Its role as a residential center and marketplace in Sussex County will be fulfilled through good partnerships and planning. Its citizens will take pride in the way it maintains its legacy while it builds for a vibrant future. It will truly be a Laurel of Delaware.

The Town of Laurel is a historic market and residential Town at a key transportation junction in a rapidly developing area. Both land conservation and design goals for development are addressed in the Comprehensive Plan. The following unique assets of Laurel have been considered:

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- ❑ Laurel is focused on an attractive National Register Historic District, which, with 701 contributing properties, is the largest in Delaware. It has very attractive traditional residential neighborhoods. The District and neighborhoods need greater marketing and investment to combat deterioration.
- ❑ Laurel is a friendly small town with a family-oriented style and hometown quality of life and this is a major asset.
- ❑ It is a regional and state service center with retail, governmental, office, and distribution functions.
- ❑ It is a traditional market town and crossroads of Southern Delaware. These are qualities with great potential for attracting future businesses. There is a need to diversify its economy with knowledge-based small businesses. There is a need for a business park.
- ❑ The Town and Area is centered on the historic waterway of Broad Creek, a tributary to the Nanticoke River and Chesapeake Bay. In this sense, Laurel is a “hidden gem” of the Chesapeake.
- ❑ Laurel, as an incorporated municipality, has a wide range of Town institutions, facilities, services, programs and infrastructure.
- ❑ Included in these are a park system and the beginnings of a unique Greenway along Broad Creek. Laurel is truly the “Capital of the Broad Creek Greenway”. As such it has potential for new eco- and heritage tourism that can support economic development in the Town. The Greenway is a matter of County, State and Federal interest, as it will bring benefit to all levels of government.
- ❑ The Town has an attractive location within its regional framework of southwestern Delaware, a setting that includes Georgetown, Seaford and Blades, Delmar, Salisbury and the Delaware Coastal Towns.

The following goals, objectives, policies and action projects apply to the elements of the Comprehensive Plan:

B. Community Design

Community design is agreement in principle about the best patterns of architecture, scale, building material, styles, landscaping and site design. These patterns are expressed in the Town Code (especially the Zoning Ordinance and Subdivision Regulations), in the design of public improvements and in the development of new residential and business areas. They are expressed in the work of private designers and developers.

The goal for community design in Laurel is to reflect its historical character as a town of one- and two-story buildings in a village setting of small, richly landscaped lots. Modern architectural details and finishes should be incorporated freely in motifs combining new and old.

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The Town now focuses on two commercial districts. The first is the historical Town Center at Market Street and Central Avenue, the earlier “100% corner” of Laurel. The second is the US Route 13 Commercial Highway less than two miles to the east. The Town Center is struggling to find new uses to replace the general merchandising and related retail uses which once concentrated there. These uses are gone because of the enlargement of modern market and service areas and the infeasibility of providing large parking lots in the historic downtown. The challenge is to target and find specialty retail, institutional, entertainment and office uses that can thrive by being in the Town Center. The challenge with Route 13 area is to find ways to improve its “wild frontier” attractiveness and its connections with the “hidden” historical Town to its west.

Within the Town, development should be “gathered” along street frontages with small or no setbacks from streets and sidewalks. Favored materials should be brick and clapboard, allowing for new innovations and materials through organized design review. A “neighborhood” approach to design should be developed in which the design of an individual structure is related to the design of its surroundings. “Streetscape” means a “family” of such elements as street and sidewalk paving treatments, directional and place signage, special lighting fixtures, benches and street trees and other plantings. Streetscape is what people see and remember, creating the image of the Town.

Two key community design principles are neotraditional design and clustering:

Neotraditional Design emphasizes a mixture of principal uses rather than only one, variation and clustering in densities, traditional street and block patterns, interior streets with smaller cartway widths, more rectilinear and continuous street patterns, streetscapes with rows of facades and porches close to the street, careful design and improvement of alleys and courtyards, continuity of sidewalks, walking trails, paths and other pedestrian-friendly ways, use of vertical curbs, planting of street trees in regular rows, more traditional block configurations, use of town squares, plazas, commons and other open spaces in a neighborhood design, zero-lot line and variegated setbacks (as in older villages), transit stops and shelters, landscaped buffers, gateway entrances and treatment of development edges. Neotraditional design emulates the traditional village development patterns of the past and is hence referred to as “neotraditional”.

Clustering in New Subdivision Projects and Dwelling Groups: Clustering gathers together buildings on the portions of a site most appropriate for building. It leaves the other portions open and clear of buildings. The open space should occur on the portions which are not suitable for building because of natural conditions or because of natural features that should be protected or even enhanced. In Clustering, the Planning and Zoning Commission is authorized to encourage the modification of the density requirements of the Zoning Ordinance. The overall “gross” density (based on the total area of the site) still must conform to the standard set by the Zoning Ordinance, usually based on minimum lot size. However, after clustering one portion of the site will have a

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higher density and others a lower density or no density at all. Approval for clustering occurs at the time of Zoning, Subdivision and Site Plan Approval. Its purpose is to achieve flexibility of design in order to promote the most appropriate use of land, the economical provision of streets and utilities and preservation of the natural environment.

The design aspects of the Comprehensive Plan are standards for building setbacks, façade treatments, landscaping and relationships to public spaces. These standards need to be carried into the Town Zoning Ordinance. The following values are key in Laurel:

- ❑ Within the Town Center, Historic District, and Traditional Neighborhoods, where street patterns are part of Laurel’s 200-year heritage, buildings should be designed to be compatible with their neighbors, setbacks from streets should be kept to a minimum and landscaping should reflect the landscaping pattern of the larger district.
- ❑ Along Route 13, new street tree plantings would be a blessing and a handsome addition to the streetscape.
- ❑ The town-wide property fix-up and rehabilitation campaign should be continued and expanded as an action essential to correct deterioration.
- ❑ New single-family homes and townhouses can be developed on small or large lots with attractive tree planting and landscaping. Houses should “face” the street. Garages should be oriented to side streets or rear alleys. Curbs and sidewalks should be used within the Town limits. To the extent possible, houses should be two-story in height and front door entrances should be architecturally expressed with porticos, arches or gables.
- ❑ Parks should be created for both passive and active use and park furniture, pavilions, lighting and signage should be of a style consistent with the traditional design of the Town and Historic District.
- ❑ Mature trees should be maintained and new tree and flower plantings established.
- ❑ Historic and older homes should be preserved and rehabilitated.
- ❑ Laurel’s interconnected street network is a great value and should be extended continuously into new growth areas.
- ❑ Bike paths and multi-use trails can be developed alongside major roads and through parks and public areas.
- ❑ Within the Broad Creek Special Environmental and Heritage Area, the design of new development should be carefully related to the unique environmental condition of being in or adjacent to a 100-year Floodplain.
- ❑ The Town’s “Gateways”, as identified on the Framework for Future Land Use, should be highlighted and beautified with new landscaping, banners, sculpture and directional signage to give people a strong image of the best of Laurel.
- ❑ Laurel’s Comprehensive Revision of its Zoning Ordinance, now underway, is the vehicle with which to implement many of these principles. A revision of the Town’s Subdivision Regulations is needed to implement clustering and related conservation design practices.
- ❑ The Town may wish in future years to appoint a Design Advisory Panel to provide design assistance to builders and developers and to the Town itself in the design of public improvements. For the present, an important goal is to make high quality design

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a major goal in public works projects such as the Wastewater Treatment Plant upgrade.

C. Future Land Use and Zoning

The Comprehensive Plan's Future Land Use element is the guide to future development and conservation. It shall be used to guide comprehensive revision of the Town of Laurel Zoning Ordinance and related codes. It shall be used to assist Sussex County in future land use and zoning revisions within the study area. It shall serve to establish the desired Potential Growth and Annexation Boundary and Greenbelt in cooperation with Sussex County and the State of Delaware.

Map 9 - Framework for Future Land Use, shows the Town Center, Historic District, Broad Creek Area, Gateways to and from and within Laurel, the Broad Creek Greenway, the Greenway Trail, 100-year floodplain areas, identified growth areas, existing neighborhoods, the railroad corridor, the current municipal boundary, a Potential Growth and Annexation Boundary and the surrounding Greenbelt of farms and natural resource lands.

Map 10 – Potential Growth and Annexation Area depicts the area established, through analysis and discussion with the County and State, for the processing of possible requests from property owners for future annexations. Map 10 shows an area of Potential future annexation. What becomes actual annexation depends entirely on the initiative of property owners. As described earlier, special land conservation programs may also occur in this area, also at the voluntary initiative of private property owners.

Map 11 - Future Land Use establishes two new categories of land use. One is Planned Business Use for sites where, based on their size, location or condition, there is reason to believe that a planned business park approach is appropriate and feasible. The other is Residential/Agricultural Use, which is described in the Potential Growth and Annexation section.

Table 35 identifies Future Land Use by category, acreage and percentage of total for the 1.7 square mile area located within the current Town boundary. The major future land uses by category are Institutional/Civic and Residential, Lower Density. New Future Land Use Categories shown include Mixed Use Development, used extensively within the Town Center area, and Planned Business, applied to sites which, by virtue of their size, location and prior development appear to have potential as planned business development area with common signage, landscaping and public improvements.

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Table 35
The 2004 Greater Laurel Comprehensive Plan
Future Land Use By Percentage of Total, Acreage & Category
Within The Current Town Boundary

Existing Land Use Category	
Natural Resources/Open Space	3.34% 34.4
Commercial	10.1% 104.1
Industrial	0.21% 2.2
Institutional/Civic	27.8% 285.9
Miscellaneous/Other	0.01% 0.09
Planned Business	1.7% 17.3
Mixed Use Development	1.7% 17.4
Residential/Agriculture	0.05% 0.52
Residential, Lower Density	38.4% 394.3
Residential, Higher Density	6% 61.2
Residential/Mobile Homes	0.14% 1.4
Utility/Public	0.08% 0.85
Public Rights-of-Way & Other	10.5% 108.2
Total Acreage	1,027.7

Source: Nutter Associates & SU Mapping Sciences

The new land use categories shown on the Future Land Use Plan are MXD – Mixed Use Development, PB – Planned Business and TC – Town Center.

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Table 36 identifies Future Land Use categories and acreages for land between the Current Town Boundary and the Potential Growth and Annexation Area Boundary, an area of approximately 5 square miles. An additional new future land use category is Residential/Agricultural.

Table 36
The 2004 Greater Laurel Comprehensive Plan
Future Land Use By Percentage of Total, Category and Acreage
Between The Current Town Boundary and PGAA Boundary

Future Land Use Category	
Natural Resources/Open Space	7.0% 232.9
Commercial	11% 353.3
Industrial	1% 31.9
Institutional/Civic	4.7% 156.9
Mixed Use Development	0.6% 18.5
Miscellaneous/Other	0% 0
Planned Business	2.3% 78.4
Residential/Agricultural	42.2% 1,397.21
Residential, Higher Density	0% 0.04
Residential, Lower Density	22% 751.1
Residential/Mobile Homes	2% 80.1
Utility/Public	0.0% .77
Public Rights-of-Way & Other	6% 205.8
Total Acreage	3,306.9

Source: Nutter Associates & SU Mapping Sciences

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- ❑ The Comprehensive Plan shall serve as a policy guide for revitalization projects, public improvements, annexations, land subdivision, rezoning, special exception uses, design standards, variances and capital expenditures.
- ❑ It will guide changes or additions in water and sewer service, transportation improvements, planning for community facilities and the pace and timing of new development.
- ❑ Land use and community development planning shall consider both the incorporated and unincorporated portions of the Greater Laurel Area.
- ❑ Land use decisions will recognize the vision and goals expressed by the Laurel Comprehensive Plan, which are seen as inherent to Laurel's time, place and form as a historic village alongside Broad Creek.

In order to prepare a forward-looking Future Land Use Plan for The 2004 Greater Laurel Comprehensive Plan, the Framework for Future Land Use Analysis was used as a starting point.

The analysis began by examining the regional area of which the study area is a part. The regional area has several organizing characteristics. It's natural environment is defined by Broad Creek as it rises in small tributaries to the east and flows west from Trap and Chipman Ponds through Laurel to Portsville, Bethel, Phillips Landing, the Nanticoke River and the Chesapeake Bay. This natural hinterland is illustrated on the map entitled Laurel's Regional Framework.

The urban dynamic of the area is influenced by the presence of other urban centers that share the Western Sussex regional area. These include Georgetown, Sussex County's capital, to the east, Seaford with its larger population and stronger industrial base, to the north, and Federalsburg and Hurlock, urban places with substantial industrial employment, to the west in Maryland. To the south, Laurel's region is bounded by the overlapping centers of Delmar and Salisbury. This area is illustrated on the map entitled Laurel's Regional Framework.

Consideration has been given to the methodology developed by Kevin Lynch in his classic The Image of the City, published by the MIT Press in 1960. Study was made of the Sussex County Comprehensive Plan Update, prepared by Shafer Consulting for the Sussex County Council and the Sussex County Planning and Zoning Commission. A review was made of the Sussex County Long-Range Transportation Plan Update of November 2001, as prepared by Kise, Straw & Kolodner as part of a cooperative effort between Sussex County and the Delaware Department of Transportation. The recently issued State of Delaware State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) was consulted. Discussions were held with knowledgeable community and real estate experts.

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Consideration was also given to an analysis of future planned growth and proposed construction within the Town of Laurel and its surrounding area prepared by George, Miles and Buhr (GMB), dated August 15, 2003. The GMB analysis was prepared for the purpose of sizing the proposed upgrade of the Laurel Wastewater Treatment Plant, a major project of the Town of Laurel. In preparing the analysis, GMB consulted with Nutter Associates, the Town Manager and the Public Works Supervisor of the Town of Laurel.

The following elements were defined in the Framework for Future Land Use analysis:

Broad Creek Special Environmental and Heritage Area Interpretive and Visitors Center – The Plan proposes that the former Valiant Fertilizer Building on Front Street or an equivalent building be considered for use as a Visitor Center on the waterfront. It would contain a variety of visitor uses related to ecotourism, public education, marine and environmental research, boating, supporting commercial, service and office uses and parking areas.

Gateways, or nodes, within the Town of Laurel and Greater Laurel Area – Nodes are defined by Kevin Lynch as “. . . points, the strategic spots in a city into which an observer can enter, and which are the intensive foci to and from which he is traveling. They can be primarily junctions, places of a break in transportation, a crossing or convergence of paths, moments of shift from one structure to another.” Gateways are identified at the interchanges of Route 13 with Route 24 and Route 9, at the southern entry to the Town along South Central Avenue, a western entry at West 6th and Little Creek, and entry through the Five Points gateway at the center of North Laurel. The Route 13 Gateway exposes millions of people to Laurel each year. Many would enter the community if they knew what it offered.

Relationships to Other Urban Centers in the Region – The relationships to other urban centers in the Region are defined by traffic corridors like Central Avenue or Route 9 and by the development patterns affecting these connectors. These relationships are focused along the roadways connecting Laurel to other centers in the region: the Woodland Ferry Road, Route 13A and Central Avenue connecting with Seaford and Delmar, Route 9 connecting to Georgetown, the county capital, Route 24 connecting with the Indian River and Delaware Beaches area, and Route 13, connecting Laurel with its larger region of Norfolk, Wilmington and Philadelphia.

Utility Infrastructure Corridors – George, Miles and Buhr, assisted by Nutter Associates and Town staff prepared an analysis of future growth affecting wastewater treatment capacity. This analysis, contained in Appendix A, identifies utility extension corridors at Routes 24 and 9. It is anticipated that there will be utility extensions and annexation requests at these locations.

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Growth Areas and Special Districts – Based on Delaware’s House Bill 255 and its definition of a planned approach to municipal annexation, a potential growth and annexation area has been defined within the Study Area. The growth and annexation area definition is consistent with practice in Delaware since the passage of HB 255. It defines an area with clusters of properties within a reasonable distance from the present Town boundary. It does not mean that the entire area indicated will be annexed. Annexation is a voluntary procedure initiated by property owners based on their own perceptions of needs.

Within the Study Area the following areas were included within the potential growth area:

1. The area north of the present municipal boundary and extending north to Camp and Bethel Roads. This area consists of residential development between the Norfolk and Southern Railroad and Road 13A, the Seaford Road, as well as farming areas between Seaford Road and Discount Land Road.
2. The area along Discount Land Road, Georgetown Road and Sycamore Road northeast of US Route 13. Beyond the commercial frontage on the east side of Route 13, this area is used for scattered single-family housing development along the roads and farmland behind the roads. Like area 1, it is experiencing growth pressure.
3. The area west of Laurel and Little creek, now occupied by farmland and experiencing single-family home development along 6th Street.
4. The area south of 10th Street and west of the Norfolk and Southern railroad, which is occupied by the Odd Fellows Cemetery and farmland.
5. The area of existing housing, served by individual wells and septic systems, along South Central Avenue from the present municipal boundary south.
6. The area along Gordy Road south of Trussum Pond Road, presently in use as farmland with individual houses and some commercial development between Gordy Road and US Route 13.
7. The Trussum Pond Road business area east of US Route 13.

Commercial Centers – US Route 13, as defined above, Central Avenue and the Town Center and Broad Creek are identified as commercial areas for the study of targeted economic development potentials. Route 13 is the focus of mass and general merchandising serving a large region of Maryland and Delaware. Central Avenue north and south of Broad Creek is the focus of convenience retailing and related services, such as the Post Office, for the Greater Laurel Area. There are several vacant and deteriorated buildings in this area that require attention and remarketing.

Business Parks and Industrial Areas – Laurel has almost no industrial zoning as a result of its long agricultural tradition. The Framework analysis identifies a need to identify sites for one or more planned Business and Technology Parks. Possible sites identified include

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the former fertilizer plant site north of Broad Creek between the railway and Poplar Street, the area along Trussum Pond Road east of Route 13 and the industrial site south of 10th Street centered on the railroad tracks.

In addition to depicting the land use categories shown on the Existing Land Use Map, the Future Land Use Plan also depicts the following additional categories of land use:

The Town Center Area within the Town of Laurel, consisting of the properties between Front Street on the north, the railroad tracks on the west, and lines including the properties east of Delaware Avenue on the east and Market Street on the south.

The Town Center Area is a mixed-use area comprising the historic center of Laurel. It is fundamentally commercial in use but the Town Center recognizes the benefit of allowing a mix of residential, small-scale retail, institutional, entertainment, open space, service and business uses. The intent of the District is to ensure that any use permitted is compatible with the character of the district. Much of the development in this District will occur through adaptive reuse of existing buildings.

Residential Infill Areas were identified in the future land use analysis. These are sites that are vacant or in agricultural use but are surrounded by residential development. Working with developers and non-profit agencies, the Town should identify a number of these sites for rental housing development. The Town should also encourage the renovation of existing rental housing units.

Natural Resource/Open Space – On the Future Land Use Plan, open space is grouped with agriculture and natural resource uses to present a coherent picture of the network of green space around Laurel. Project sites which fall within this category include the Laurel River Park along Broad Creek in West Laurel, the proposed Laurel Gardens park on the edge of the Creek between Central Avenue and Poplar Street and the proposed Nanticoke Small Boat Harbor site at Wastewater Treatment Plant Lagoon #3.

A Broad Creek Greenway Overlay is shown on the Future Land Use Plan in order to highlight the special character of those portions of the Broad Creek Greenway which require revitalization action to establish the Greenway Trail and accomplish redevelopment around the Broad Creek Recreational Harbor.

Planned Business Areas that have the potential for planned business development.

Mixed Use Development Areas where a mixture of principal uses is appropriate.

Residential/Agricultural Areas where property owners are expected to elect to choose between Residential Use, most likely requesting annexation, or Agricultural Use, most likely requesting inclusion in Delaware's Agricultural Lands Preservation Program..

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D. Economic Development

The objectives for economic development are to achieve a healthy pace of growth, develop the tax base of the Town and implement partnerships that accomplish the goals of the Comprehensive Plan. Having partnerships with strong standards will protect the natural and historic environment, accomplish sustainable residential, commercial and civic development and achieve the Plan's design objectives. The Town commits itself to directing development to existing close-in areas with adequate public facilities and services. The purpose in doing so is to ensure harmonious development, minimize infrastructure costs and avoid unnecessary taxes.

- ❑ Laurel's economy has always been that of a well-located agricultural market center, symbolized by the Laurel Farmers Auction and Grain Silos, including the transshipment of the rich bounty of the surrounding agricultural fields to distant markets by Chesapeake Bay Schooner Rams, Rail cars and Trucks each in its own age. This economy is now changing and it is essential that Laurel seek new forms of knowledge-based economic activity to supplement the traditional base. Given the need to give organization to economic development initiatives, it is for this reason that the Comprehensive Plan recommends the creation of a Laurel Business and Technology Park.
- ❑ Seek to attract new knowledge-based marketing, professional, information processing, scientific research, transshipment, distribution and light assembly operations. Work closely with the Delaware Office of Economic Development (DeDo) and the Sussex County Economic Development Office to recruit them through visits, invitations, briefings, mailings and advertisement.
- ❑ Continue a public-private partnership approach to the revitalization of the Town Center and Broad Creek. (Appendix B presents a recommended Public-Private Partnership procedure for Laurel)
- ❑ The Town should work with Laurel Public Schools, Sussex Tech, Delaware State College and the Universities of Delaware and Salisbury to build the labor skills and job base of the Greater Laurel Area.
- ❑ The Town should support Laurel's rich collection of civic associations in their voluntary endeavors, ranging from the Laurel Community Foundation, the Laurel Fire Department to the Laurel Lion's Club Foundation and Delaware Community Foundation, and should be supported in its projects by them in return. See the list of Laurel's community service organizations in Appendix C.
- ❑ Promote the skills and potentials of Laurel's Labor Market within its effective region.

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E. Transportation

The objective for Transportation is to provide safe and efficient transportation for pedestrians, bicyclists, hikers, boaters, motorists, air transport and commercial freight. This includes the reworking of street designs to make them more attractive as well as more functional.

- ❑ Within the Special Broad Creek Environmental and Heritage Area, design and develop a new pedestrian and vehicular circulation system along the chain of Broad Creek sites. This should emphasize the preservation of historic streets like Front Street, Willow Street, Cooper Street and Oak Street. Included would be streetscape treatments, signage that identifies and interprets features of the special area, and new landscaping emphasizing native plants and trees like Laurel, Cedar and Cypress.
- ❑ Implement Transportation Improvements including DeIDOT intersection designs for US Route 13 and 5 Points, Gateway streetscape improvement for the Route 13 intersections with Routes 9 and 24, Five Points and South Central Avenue, planning for growth in transit service and a renewal of recreational boating in Broad Creek between the Records Pond Dam and the Nanticoke River.
- ❑ Develop a cooperative plan with property owners in the Town Center to interconnect and cooperatively use adjacent public and private parking lots as one unified system, with common signage and advertising.
- ❑ Encourage greater pedestrian use of neighborhood, Historic District, Town Center and Broad Creek streets and sidewalks by promoting walking tours of these areas. Included would be signage and walking route markers and maps and volunteer guides. Develop new links in the pedestrian system, possibly including a pedestrian bridge across Broad Creek between West Laurel and the proposed Small Boat Harbor site.
- ❑ Meet with Norfolk-Southern Railroad and Conrail to discuss pedestrian connections beneath the Railroad Bridge as well as any possible new rail sidings connection that might serve industrial development in the Town of Laurel.
- ❑ Meet with Laurel Airport officials to discuss possible cooperative actions to promote greater use of the airport and greater air accessibility to residents and businesses in Laurel.
- ❑ The Town should define specific street reconstruction, improvement and streetscape projects by timing, estimated cost and sources of funding, and include these in a Five-Year Capital Improvement Program.
- ❑ Promote greater use of bicycles in the Study Area by promoting extensions of the Southern Delaware Heritage Trail and the promotion of bicycle travel on roadways that are well located for bicycles and have wide shoulders.

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- ❑ Better integrate US Route 13 into the life of the Town through reevaluating traffic flows, intersection improvements and design of streetscape projects which can be combined with infrastructure improvements.
- ❑ Encourage completion of DeIDOT identified road and intersection improvement projects along Route 13 and within the Town and surrounding area.
- ❑ Work with surrounding municipalities, Sussex County, DeIDOT and the Laurel Chamber of Commerce on planning for road and other transportation improvements.
- ❑ Maintain and upgrade Town streets and parking areas as necessary.
- ❑ The Town should work with DeIDOT to define a Five Year Capital Improvement Program for Transportation Projects.

F. Environmentally Sensitive Areas

The objective for Environmentally Sensitive Areas is to protect them for the benefit of all residents using Federal, State, County and Town resources for environmental protection.

Environmentally sensitive areas are illustrated on Map 4. Four categories of environmentally sensitive areas are included:

Waterways including Broad Creek and its tributary creeks and millponds. These include: Chipman Pond, the James Branch flowing from Trap and Trussum Ponds, Rodgers Branch, Records Pond, Rossakatum Branch, Little Creek and several unnamed branches flowing into the Creek from the north. Broad Creek is a major tributary of the upper Nanticoke River. According to the 28th edition of the National Atmospheric and Oceanic Administration (NOAA) Nautical Chart for the Honga, Nanticoke and Wicomico Rivers, dated July 2002, the depth of Broad Creek at Phillips Landing is approximately 12 feet. It is approximately 10 feet at Bethel and some 5 feet between Bethel and Laurel. It is known that there has been sedimentation. There is a shoal at the mouth of the Creek and are downed trees between Laurel and Bethel.

The waterways are Laurel's most sensitive environmental feature. In times of storm, hurricane or flooding, and in the daily and seasonal cycle of hydrology in the area, it is essential that the waterways be protected.

Map 4 also shows the 100-year floodplain in the Study Area, as delineated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. The 100-Year Floodplain is that area likely to fill with water on an average of once each 100 years. During the recent Hurricane Isabel (September 2003), Broad Creek rose to an elevation some five feet lower than the 100-Year FEMA-identified level. It appears that the flooding caused by Hurricane Isabel will require the condemnation and removal of one structure in Laurel's 100-year floodplain.

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It is important to note that the Laurel Wastewater Treatment Plant Lagoon #3 is located entirely within the 100-Year Floodplain. For this reason, it must be terminated for use as a part of the Wastewater Treatment Plant upgrade project.

State-designated wetlands are also shown on Map 4. As the Map illustrates these areas are in many instances located 2 or more miles inland from Broad Creek. They serve an invaluable holding and release function as part of the hydrology system and need to be preserved.

The Town of Laurel Historic District, within its 1988 boundaries, is shown on Map 8. The State Historic Preservation Office has also studied three proposed extensions of the Laurel Historic District, including areas of West Laurel, North Laurel and East Laurel. These areas are also shown on Map 8.

Important National Register Historic structures located in the Historic District or elsewhere in the Greater Laurel Study Area include the Laurel Train Station on Mechanic Street, the Cook House on 4th Street, the Studley House on 6th Street and Christ Church on Chipman Pond.

Proposed expansions to National Historic Districts are processed in the same way as original District applications. A narrative justification is needed to explain the need for adding to the size of the district. The Town should work with the Sussex County and the Delaware State Historic Preservation Officer to prepare and process the documentation need for the three proposed expansions shown on Map 5..

The Greater Laurel Greenway is at the center of the hydrology and topography of the Study Area. The waterway system is a part of the Nanticoke River and Chesapeake Bay. It must be protected against environmental degradation. The improvement of Laurel's Wastewater Treatment Plant will be a major contribution to improving and protecting this unique natural environment.

- ❑ The Federal Clean Water Act now requires that Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) be established for waterways with impaired water quality so the waterways can attain their designated uses. TMDL's are Total Maximum Daily Loads as a calculation of the maximum amount of a pollutant that a waterbody can receive and still meet water quality standards, and an allocation of that amount to the waterbody in question.
- ❑ Total Maximum Daily Loads have been established for Broad Creek pursuant to the December 1998 Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) Analysis for the Nanticoke River and Broad Creek, Delaware, prepared by the Watershed Assessment Section of DNREC's Division of Water Resources. The State's TMDL findings require that nitrogen loads from non-point sources affecting the Creek be reduced by 30 percent relative to the 1992 baseline, and that phosphorus loads be reduced by 50%.

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The Laurel Wastewater Treatment Plant is required to cap phosphorus and nitrogen loads. Alternatives for reducing pollution from stormwater runoff include installing buffers along streams and promoting good lawn maintenance practices (i.e. proper application of fertilizer, herbicides, pesticides, etc.) on town-maintained grounds and on private properties as well.

- The Town of Laurel will work with DNREC to develop a TMDL and related pollution control strategy.
- A part of the Town's TMDL control strategy should consist of the use of EPA Best Management Practices in the final design of the Wastewater Treatment Plant upgrade, and in policies governing the design review and approval of development projects. Control and limitation of surface runoff is the major objective of these practices.
- Elements of the TMDL reduction strategy include:
 - Reduction of nitrogen loads by 30%
 - Reduction of phosphorus loads by 50%
 - Avoiding development on hydric soils
 - Establishing vegetative buffers
 - Limiting impervious surfaces
 - Improving storm water quality through the use of Best Management Practices
 - Retrofitting storm water drains to block passage and filter harmful materials
 - Removal of bacteria, nutrients and sediments
 - Avoiding Combined Sewer Overflows (CSO's)
- In addition, the planned comprehensive zoning and code revisions should include measures to limit development within the 100-year floodplain. Development should be limited in this FEMA-designated area by types of permitted developments, base flood elevations, densities and setback requirements.

G. Community Facilities and Services

The objective with regard to Public Facilities is to provide for the needs of the Town's citizens, businesses and visitors with adequate public facilities, to provide facilities that are adequate to serve planned growth and to plan for facility expansion where necessary.

- Continue to renovate and strengthen the Town Center Complex, including Town Hall, the Police Department, the Railroad Station and adjacent property on the former Marvil Packaging site as a true Town Center for Laurel.
- School sites should be identified as conditional, or special exception, uses in all zoning districts in the Town's Comprehensive Zoning revisions.
- Laurel should work with future developers to ask them where appropriate to set aside lands for future school construction needs.

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- ❑ In the restored Train Station, or another nearby building, the Town should establish an Internet Center to build on the World Wide Web Page the Town is now developing. The integration of an Internet Center with the Laurel Historic Museum proposed for the restored Train Station is an opportunity. At this location, it would benefit from association with Laurel's history and historic district. The Center could begin small and grow to include some of the following elements and services:
 - ❑ Close integration with the Town World Wide Web Site, consisting of a composite of different pages with tourism, economic development, planning, citizen service, police and fire, historical, planning, demographic, business and related data elements, all easily colorfully illustrated with photographs, maps and drawings.
 - ❑ Adding interest to the restored Train Station and Museum.
 - ❑ Including a small coffee shop, as an Internet "Cafe" element.
 - ❑ A small welcoming center with brochures, maps and information for the visiting public.
 - ❑ A strong interactive relationship with the expanded Laurel Public Library, only 2 blocks away.
 - ❑ Possibly including a small version of the excellent "Made in Delaware" shop next to the Schwartz Performing Arts Center in Dover.
 - ❑ Possibly a small exhibit of Laurel-related artwork
 - ❑ Possibly a model railroad exhibit and/or model of the historic Railroad-era Town Center and its Broad Creek harbor.

H. Historic and Cultural Resources

The objective of the Historic and Cultural Resources element is to fully document the historic resources of Laurel and to identify appropriate new uses and funding sources for them as appropriate.

- ❑ Work to preserve and to promote the Town's historic architecture and the Laurel Historic District.
- ❑ Work to expand the Historic District by helping the Laurel Historical Society and the State Historic Preservation Office document the necessary narrative and process it through the necessary steps. In doing so, the Town should clarify with the State procedures for design review and approval for actions proposed in the District. A steam-lined procedure for the review of relatively simple actions such as re-sidings of houses or exterior repairs should be developed.
- ❑ Encourage creative adaptive reuse of historic structures, including allowance for flexibility.

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- ❑ The Town should actively preserve the family of historic bridges over Broad Creek, including the Railroad Trestle, the Poplar Street Bridge and the Central Avenue Bridge.
- ❑ Make residents and visitors more aware of the Historic District and other historic buildings and sites, promoting the District through house tours, walking tours and brochures, streetscape design and special events.
- ❑ The Town should request that the State Historic Preservation Office develop additional documentation for the three areas proposed for extension of the Laurel Historic District. At the same time, the Town should document its views as to the economic needs for successful reinvestment and rehabilitation in the three areas and consider their relationship to the US Secretary of the Interiors Guidelines and Standards for Historic Rehabilitation.
- ❑ The Town should encourage developers who are qualified to undertake rehabilitation projects in the Historic District to investigate the use of State of Delaware and federal Historic Preservation Tax Credits for their projects.
- ❑ The Town should create a Laurel Historic District Overlay District as part of its Comprehensive Zoning Revisions Project. Within this Overlay District the Planning and Zoning Commission would be requested to give special attention to historic factors.
- ❑ The town should consider the creation of a full Historic District Historic Preservation Ordinance for the District, one that establishes formal historic review guidelines and establishes a Historic Preservation District Commission to conduct these reviews. In doing so, the Town should consider adding reasonable affordability measures, as the City of Lewes has done.
- ❑ Laurel is an ancient community of Nanticoke Indian roots. It has a long and varied history of development only just beginning to be interpreted. Important themes are its Nanticoke Indian heritage, the early migration of English families from Virginia and Maryland, Water Transport on Broad Creek, New Immigrants From Around The World, the American Revolution and Civil war, African American History and The Underground Railroad and Agricultural and Industrial History. The role played by the Black Watermen of West Laurel should be researched.

I. Housing

The objective of the Housing Element is to ensure an adequate supply and diversity of safe, decent and well-designed home ownership and rental housing for both present and future residents.

- ❑ View housing fix-up and rehabilitation in all neighborhoods of Laurel as a primary goal of the Comprehensive Plan. This can best be achieved by pursuing town-wide improvements in code revisions and code enforcement.

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- ❑ Vacant infill sites should be identified for redevelopment with appropriate home ownership and rental housing.
- ❑ Redevelop vacant sites in West Laurel with new developer-built home ownership homes, using the home ownership counseling services of the First State Community Action Agency. Supplement this effort with street, sidewalk and streetscape improvements as appropriate, especially at Townsend and Belle and Webb and 7th Streets.
- ❑ Make creative use of Community Development Block Grant and housing rehabilitation funds to improve housing conditions where they are most severe in Laurel.
- ❑ The Town of Laurel should work closely with the Delaware State Housing Authority to develop a housing policy. The Town should allow accessory apartment units in residential districts in its Zoning Code.
- ❑ The Town should encourage housing designs with roof pitches and eave dimensions consistent with Laurel's traditional architectural styles.
- ❑ In the larger marketing sense, Laurel should prepare itself for a new level of interest on the part of retiring members of the Baby Boom generation, born between 1946 and 1964. This enormous segment (approximately one-third) of the American population is now beginning to reach its retirement years. At the present time, the "leading edge" of the Baby Boom, persons born between 1946 and 1950 are approaching retirement. Many live in the Philadelphia, Wilmington, Baltimore, Washington DC and Norfolk metropolitan areas. It is predicted that some 30 million American households of this generation will seek new residential locations over the next twenty years. Delmarva is an attractive location to this group. The pattern appears to be that its members prefer smaller, somewhat more urban house styles and lots, with houses focused on first floor living. Laurel will surely attract its share of new residents from the group, especially given the growth characteristics of Sussex County.
- ❑ Encourage the development of an innovative, well-designed Senior Retirement Housing development on a Laurel site that is as close to the Town Center as possible.
- ❑ Promote Laurel as a community for artist's studios and living units, again on sites in or close to the Town Center.
- ❑ Address housing rehabilitation needs throughout the Study Area with housing rehabilitation incentives coordinated between the Town of Laurel, the Sussex County Community Development and Housing Division and the Delaware State Housing Authority.
- ❑ Encourage innovative subdivision and housing designs by upgrading the Town's zoning ordinance, subdivision regulations and housing code.
- ❑ Recognize the Town's historic housing stock as its single greatest asset for the future

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- ❑ Develop an active housing fix-up, reinvestment, rehabilitation and new development effort including both home ownership and rental housing
- ❑ Strongly limit conversions of single-family homes to multi-family units or commercial uses
- ❑ Provide planning support for strong and prompt enforcement of the Housing and Building Codes, Zoning Ordinance, Maintenance Code and Subdivision Regulations
- ❑ Continue to develop affordable and assisted housing programs within Laurel, including provision for Senior Citizen and Special Populations housing
- ❑ At the same time, recognize that Laurel has done a great deal with assisted multi-family housing in the recent past and that it should now be a time of emphasizing the preservation and development of single-family, owner-occupied houses
- ❑ Institute a maintenance and replacement program for mature street trees in residential neighborhoods
- ❑ Identify and promote new residential development areas with low-density, well-designed housing types well-suited for Laurel
- ❑ In new housing development, seek to implement the Smart Growth density and design principles of the Livable Delaware program and the principles enunciated by the Sussex County Comprehensive Plan. These design principles give guidance to developers to consider densities of at least 3-4 units per acre in order to concentrate development and conserve open land. They also encourage developers to use a clustered design for new subdivisions, where living units are concentrated in the portion of the site most suitable for development, and the remainder of the site left open for conservation and recreation.

J. Commercial and Business Areas

The objective of the Commercial and Business Areas Element is to diversify and expand the economic base of Greater Laurel with knowledge-based, light assembly, small manufacturing and distribution uses, as well as new specialty retail and service uses in the Town Center area.

- ❑ US Route 13 is the most powerful location for retailing in the Greater Laurel Area. It includes lodging, convenience, restaurant, auction house, furniture, farmers market (Laurel Grain) and other marketplace (Bill's Bargain market, the Dutch Country Market, and the Route 13 Market) uses. Both Bargain Bill's and Johnny Janosik are planning major additions. Along Trussum Pond Road are located an array of retail, light industrial, small office and institutional uses. The policy with regard to US Route 13 should be to try to interconnect the Town with this powerful tourism, retail and business concentration. This can be accomplished through improving the municipal water and sewer systems, welcoming new parties to annexation, improving the Laurel Gateways on the highway and collaborative

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working relationships. It appears that Trussum Pond sites could be developed in the manner of a planned Business Park with municipal water and sewer service.

- ❑ Work with DeIDOT, Sussex County and private businesses and property owners to develop streetscape and signage programs to treat the identified “Gateways” to Laurel, including those on US Route 13, on South Central Avenue and at Five Points.
- ❑ Within the Town Center, work closely with the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation to further the Façade Treatment program which LRC has begun. This partnership Team should develop a joint marketing approach to attract new retail, office and institutional users to Laurel’s traditional downtown.
- ❑ Undertake marketing with LRC to attract new commercial uses and tenants to the Town Center.
- ❑ Support the idea of convenient small-scale neighborhood retail uses wherever possible, including as part of new Mixed-Use developments.
- ❑ Work to help promote, and help plan, Mixed-Use Commercial/Business/Institutional “community business parks” along Trussum Pond Road and Route 13.
- ❑ Work jointly with the Delaware Economic Development Office, the Sussex County Department of Economic Development and the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation to promote and plan for a major Business and Technology Park on a prominent site close to the Town Center.
- ❑ Work to attract high quality, knowledge-based, technology-oriented service, office and other commercial/industrial businesses.
- ❑ Encourage maximum landscaping and street trees on commercial sites
- ❑ In mixed-use areas, where single-family houses have been converted to commercial use, preserve front lawns, landscaping and residential architectural styles
- ❑ Work to retain existing businesses and to attract new business and industry to a Town of Laurel Business and Technology Park
- ❑ Encourage clean up of deteriorated buildings and sites, including sites that may be “brownfield sites” in the sense of having some contamination as a result of past use.

K. Open Space and Outdoor Recreation

The objective for the Broad Creek Greenway, Open Space and Outdoor Recreation element of the Plan is to add Laurel’s needs and build on its assets in School and Town recreational facilities, the beauty of the Laurel River and Janosik Parks, the challenge of Market Square, the promise of continuous Promenade along the banks of Broad Creek and the promise of the Broad Creek Greenway and Greenway Trail to create an interconnected network of open space for future generations. The objective is also to develop fair measures to request that developers contribute to Laurel’s open space system.

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- ❑ Pursue the active development and implementation of Land Conservation Programs for the countryside surrounding Laurel, with a high priority on creating a Greater Laurel Area Greenbelt and preserving irreplaceable natural resource and prime agricultural lands along the Broad Creek Greenway.
- ❑ Create a new “Laurel Gardens” Park on the bank of Broad Creek between Poplar Street and Central Avenue, using laurel plantings and other native species as a design theme. The park should be designed and operated as a gathering place for special events.
- ❑ Working closely with DNREC and Sussex County, create a trails and pedestrian way program linking special places in the Broad Creek Greenway. The linked places should include the Nanticoke Wildlife Management Area, Phillips Landing, Woodland Ferry, the Koch Natural Legacy Area, Portsville, Shellbridge Road, Bethel and its Maritime Museum on Old Sailor’s Path, Woodland ferry Road, the Laurel Historic District, The Southern Delaware Heritage Trail, Records, Chipman, Trussum and Trap Ponds, and area farms with agri-tourism activities. The program should work closely with volunteer and non-profit organizations like the Nanticoke River Watershed Conservancy, The Nature Conservancy, The Laurel Boys and Girls Club and the Chesapeake Bay Foundation.
- ❑ The Town should apply to include Laurel and Broad Creek in the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network and Water Trails program, coordinating this with planning for the Broad Creek Greenway and Greenway Trail.
- ❑ Plan for the redesign and redevelopment of the Market Square Park in the Town Center. The redesign should include an appropriately scaled mixed-use building on all or a portion of the street frontage of this downtown site. An equally important part of the program should be a trail connecting the site to Broad Creek.
- ❑ As part of the comprehensive revision of the Town zoning ordinance, establish new standards for landscaped buffers, planted setback areas, provision for open space on development sites and set asides for future recreational space.
- ❑ Implement the proposed Nanticoke Small Boat Harbor as a focus of the open space network, especially for linkages between the creek, Old Town, West Laurel and the Laurel Gardens Park.
- ❑ In order to accomplish these policies within the framework of the Comprehensive Plan, a Town of Laurel Broad Creek Greenway, Open Space and Outdoor Recreation Program should be prepared. The program would:
 - ❑ Provide an Implementation Program for the Open Space recommendations of The Comprehensive Plan,
 - ❑ Take the development concept for the Broad Creek development sites to an advanced level of precision, specifying uses that will contribute to the Greenway and the Town Center, that are environmentally appropriate and that will contribute to the design landscape,
 - ❑ Develop the Water Trail component of the Greenway for returning small scale boating activity to Broad Creek between the Nanticoke River and the

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- Poplar Street Bridge in the Town Center, and identifying sound action projects to implement this,
- Be coordinated with the new, February 2004 2003-2008 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) prepared by DNREC, including its survey of Western Sussex County preferences and priorities,
 - Give stronger definition to the Broad Creek Greenway natural corridor centered on Broad Creek, and the Broad Creek Greenway Trail, especially in the central area of Laurel,
 - Provide design, development, development coordination and funding plans for continuous promenades along Broad Creek, linkages to other, connected open spaces and trails,
 - Establish measures for creating natural buffers along the Rossakatum Creek, Little Creek, Rodgers Branch and other tributaries flowing into Broad Creek,
 - Conduct interviews with landowners, civic leaders and other stakeholders,
 - Work closely with DNREC and the Delaware Department of Agriculture,
 - Work with other municipalities and historical communities in the Study Area, including Bethel, Woodland ferry and Portsville,
 - Work with neighborhood groups and agencies to assess the needs for new neighborhood parks, play grounds and equipment, ball fields, school recreation facilities and walkways within the Town and its immediate environs,
 - Consider the relationships between new streetscape design treatments and the provision of open space,
 - Update earlier Broad Creek Greenway design and development plans,
 - Inventory important elements of existing open space within Laurel, whether publicly or privately owned or in active or passive use, and consider measures which may help preserve these spaces where open space has the greatest benefit to the community,
 - Identify the best current practices in Delaware or elsewhere for seeking reasonable set asides of open space by developers in their development projects,
 - Stress measures to achieve an interconnected and continuous open space system in which one facility is connected with the next,
 - Address the relative roles in oversight, planning, special and general benefit, design, development, ownership and operation of neighborhood groups, line agencies, private parties, non-profits and state, County and local government,
 - Address the best role that Town and County zoning ordinances and subdivision regulations can play in carrying out a comprehensive open space and outdoor recreation program,

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- ❑ Identify open space items which should be included in a Five-Year Town of Laurel Capital Improvement Program,
- ❑ Consider project characteristics which indicate eligibility for funding sources such as Transportation Enhancement under the Surface Transportation Act, the federal Land and water Conservation Fund, the Delaware Trust Fund and the Governor's Green Infrastructure Program,
- ❑ Give special consideration to recreational needs involving public school sites and facilities, including new sites that might be dedicated in future developments,
- ❑ Develop a program to identify and acquire easements necessary for trail development,
- ❑ Develop a phasing plan by five-year increments and a priorities plan by very high, high and moderate categories,
- ❑ Consider the need for new street trees, other tree plantings, floral gardens, vegetative buffers, and other landscaping treatments, and the possibility of a special ordinance to implement these measures, and
- ❑ Design measures for increasing public appreciation of the Greenway, including volunteer organization, publicity, festivals and special events, and community outreach and educational programs.

L. Institutional and Civic Uses

Institutional and civic uses are seen as key to the vitality of community life and pride. The objective is to support existing institutions and seek to create new ones as community growth occurs.

- ❑ Support Town institutions and voluntary associations, like the Laurel Fire Department, and the Town's many non-profit and charitable organizations in their roles of providing valuable service to the Town, its residents and visitors.
- ❑ Work closely with Laurel Public schools and its Parent-Teacher Association to help make Laurel a center of academic excellence and community involvement, and to involve students in exciting Town projects that might interest them.
- ❑ Support cooperative efforts among institutions.
- ❑ Renovate the Laurel Town Hall and the nearby Town-owned Marvil Packaging Building to include new space for the Laurel Police Department, Public Works and Planning and Zoning. Develop a redesigned site plan for the Town Hall site that integrates the renovated Town Hall with the remainder of the site, including the Train Station.
- ❑ Restore the Laurel Train Station as a Laurel Historical Museum and other compatible uses.

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- Proceed with the expansion and renovation of the Laurel Public Library at its present site and on adjoining land, including planning for the shared use of nearby parking lots.

M. Town Center and Broad Creek

- Designate the Broad Creek area as a Special Broad Creek Greenway Heritage and Environmental Area, with special use and design controls to both protect the area against inappropriate or too-dense development and also positively attract developments which will bring new life to this unique Laurel place
- Work in partnership with the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation to this end
- Bring new business investment and people activity to Laurel's Town Center through:
 - Focus on new specialty retail, entertainment, dining, convenience goods and services, collectible and consignment shop and small business and office uses in rejuvenating downtown Laurel
 - Encouragement of visiting, shopping, tourism and related development, including development of a Broad Creek Interpretive and Visitors Center
 - Sensitive redevelopment of Broad Creek and other Town Center sites in a linked and coordinated manner, relating them to Broad Creek Greenway development
 - Develop an attractive Farmers Market in Market Square, utilizing the park space for this purpose
 - Redevelop and improve vacant Market Street sites for new uses
 - Add aesthetic improvements, including additional street trees, landscaping and street furniture in public areas, encourage architectural styles which are a proportioned mix of traditional and modern, and other design improvements to the Town Center in order to add interest at the street level
 - Work with the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation and Laurel Historical Society collaboratively on major projects
 - Create a coordinated, manageable downtown parking system which is based on the interconnection, common signage and centralized management of the many individual surface parking lots which presently exist, basing this approach on a written Memorandum of Understanding between the Town and parking lot owners

Laurel is a vital small town with close relationship between people and institutions. This small-town spirit should be encouraged and preserved by making public functions open and welcoming to residents and visitors alike. Forums should be developed for frequent gatherings and discussions between community residents and businesses. These measures will be especially important as Laurel grows and attracts new residents and businesses.

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The values of community, excellence and progress should be developed through workshops involving the public and leadership institutions such as Town government, the Laurel Historical Society, the Laurel Chamber of Commerce and the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation.

Within the framework of larger concepts for the treatment of the 10-mile long Broad Creek Greenway from Trap Pond in the east to Phillips Landing and the Nanticoke River in the west, and of Laurel's overall Town Center area, the following developments are planned and/or recommended for consideration as part of the Comprehensive Plan. The numbered sites are illustrated on the map exhibit entitled Town Center and Greenway.

A creek walk promenade and connecting trails should be continuous on both sides of Broad creek, connecting with Laurel River Park on the south side and the "Old Sailors' Path" on the north side.

- (1) The Mill Dam area and Willow Street Bridge and Embankment – This is a wonderful natural and scenic place in Laurel. The Records Pond Dam is an ideal location for fishing, hiking and biking across Willow Street. Add landscaping, improvements for fishing, interpretive signage and benches for sitting to this historical place of origin of Laurel.
- (2) The Laureltown development Between Delaware Avenue and Willow Street, this small village-atmosphere commercial development reflects the scale and vitality of Laurel. Janosik Park along the creek is a handsome feature. Laurel bushes should be transplanted to the edge of the creek in this area.
- (3) The Villas on Broad Creek – Between Broad Creek, Records Pond Dam, Delaware Avenue and Willow Street at the former Cannery Site, plans are advancing toward construction for a handsome complex of 18 2-story townhouses units along Broad Creek.
- (4) "The Wading Place" – Central Avenue to Delaware Avenue – This is the historic place of beginning of human settlement in Laurel. There is a surviving baldcypress tree hundreds of years old, and marsh on the north side of the creek. This is the area, which flooded severely during Hurricane Isabel. The area between RJ's Riverside Restaurant and the Surveying Company Building on Central Avenue should be restored as fully as possible to its natural marshland state with native plantings like laurel and cypress, other landscaping and a trail connecting Delaware to Central on the north side of the creek. There is a natural trail connection north of the Surveying company Building to Central Avenue and across to the site described as the Laurel Gardens site.
- (5) Pavilion in the Broad Creek Greenway and Town Center Medical Office Complex – The LRC is advancing the planned development of a medical office complex on the Southside site between Laureltown and Central Avenue. The small yellow concrete block building located here on the south side of the creek is a very

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attractive building which might best be used as a special pavilion, occasional marketplace, exhibit venue, tourist information center and event gathering shelter for Laurel. This is the southern portion of the Wading Place site.

- (6) Laurel Gardens – On the north edge of the creek, between Poplar Street and Central Avenue, is a site well suited for community gathering and events. The topography of the site, which slopes from the north and west south to the creek, and the creek front promenade, lend themselves to shaping a fine small park. It is recommended that the portion of the site at the water’s edge be designed as a “Laurel Gardens”, featuring the use of laurel plants surrounding a community gathering spot. It might serve as an appropriate open space for a special sculpture signifying a special Laurel and Broad Creek Greenway theme.
- (7) The Old Town Waterfront Neighborhood, on the southside of the creek, is one of Laurel’s oldest neighborhood areas. It is located in the two-block area between Central Avenue and the Norfolk and Southern railroad track. The LRC has made strides in renovating buildings and facades in this interesting traditionally scaled neighborhood. The Plan recommends that this treatment continue, with an emphasis on well-scaled building treatments meant to call out the “Old Town” feeling. Selective acquisition and demolition of properties is also recommended. Within the existing built-up area of Old Town, design measures should be taken to enhance the feeling that the entire area is connected and linked to Broad Creek waterfront. Laurel Crescent – Along the Old Town frontage between Poplar Street and the railroad, pursue the LRC’s idea for an exciting Laurel Crescent townhouse development as inspired by the world-famous Bath Crescent in England. Envisioned is a small brick townhouse complex of approximately 10 units facing the water and the green buffer located opposite on the north bank of the creek. Part of the idea of the Laurel Crescent is to awaken further revitalization and discovery of the Old Town neighborhood.
- (8) Greenway Entry to the Small Boat Harbor – On the north side of the creek, between Poplar Street and the railroad bridge, the edge of the creek is ideally suited to provide a promenade, bicycle path and small vehicular roadway providing access to the Nanticoke Small Boat Harbor from the Laurel Town Center. In addition to the attractive creek frontage, the areas beneath the north and south piers and abutments of the railroad bridge offer a “magic” design environment to grace the Greenway and Small Boat harbor. The huge ashlar-cut gray granite stones of the bridge piers and abutments, the wooden cages attached as ship buffers to the piers and the exposed underbelly of the steel bridge deck, once operable, is an ideal design touch for this section of Greenway. There is sufficient space beneath the north pier area for as much as two lanes of traffic to pass. On the south side, there is sufficient width for one lane of passage. There is the possibility of connecting north and south sides at the Harbor site with a small wooden multi-use bridge. This would increase access and circulation in this area.
- (9) Nanticoke Small Boat Harbor – On the present site of lagoon number three of the Laurel Wastewater Treatment Plant, the lagoon needs to be abandoned as part of

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the upgrading of the Wastewater Treatment Plant. It should be environmentally designed according to the highest standards, reconfigured, reduced in area and lowered to the level of direct water access to and from the Creek. The Small Boat Harbor would above all reflect and implement a reconnection of the Laurel community with the river which first gave rise to the Town, the Nanticoke, and reflect Laurel's Chesapeake Bay watershed location. It would provide services and berthing for small muscle-powered and engine-powered boats, including rental boats for transient visitors to the community.

- (10) Town Center Residential and Mixed Use Development – On the north side of Broad Creek, between the sites identified for the Nanticoke Small Boat Harbor and Laurel Gardens, the large site between the railroad tracks and Poplar Street should be considered for higher density residential and mixed-use development. The development should be of high quality environmental and architectural design. It should incorporate a Greenway Trail and Promenade along the Creek leading to the small boat harbor.
- (11) New Improvements to the East Entrance to Laurel River Park – This prominent pedestrian and partial vehicular entrance to Laurel River Park should be redesigned in a welcoming and friendly manner, to match the Town's new improvements to the Park itself. A new boat ramp is planned at the park's west end. While there appears to be a need to limit vehicular access here, due to the underlying embankment, the entry signage should be changed to invite active use, possibly with 2-way circulation through the park to its western entrance and exit. In keeping with this, the Town should endeavor to find an active, supervised use that can be a constant daylight presence in the Park. The possible connection of River Park to the planned Small Boat Harbor opposite it could be a mutually beneficial solution. DNREC will install a new Boat Ramp and parking area at the west end of the Park in 2004. The boat ramp should be seen as a first phase in the development of the larger Recreational Boat Harbor to be developed on the facing side of the Creek.
- (12) Town Center Market Place - New Mixed-Use Urban Development – In the heart of the Town Center district, along Market Street, and on the southern frontage of Market Square park, consideration should be given to redesigning the site for a blend of mixed-use development building space on two or three levels, open space connecting with the embankment leading down to Broad Creek and a myriad of other pedestrian and trail connections leading to other buildings and spaces in the Town Center area. The earlier plan for Greenway development in Laurel offers many excellent potentials for these connections, which should lead to the new Laurel Public Library development, an interconnected downtown parking lot system, a refurbished Laurel Town Center and Railway Station Museum, the Laurel Historic District homes and a signed walking system.
- (13) The Western Greenway – The areas along Broad Creek west of the Town Center and Wastewater Treatment Plant can be connected into the Greenway through easements or selective acquisition of property by a public or non-profit entity. This

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is the area traversed by the “Old Sailors Path”. These areas should be studied to determine these potentials.

N. Utility Infrastructure

The objective for Public Utility Infrastructure is to maintain the quality of water, sewer, electric, gas, telephone and Internet services in order to protect and enhance the quality of life in the Greater Laurel Area. The first order of business in this is to upgrade Laurel’s own water and sewer systems, an initiative now actively underway.

- Repair and upgrade the Town’s water and wastewater systems in accordance with plans and project schedules (see Appendix D) prepared by the Town of Laurel and its engineering consultant, George, Miles & Buhr.
- Undertake future water and sewer extensions using the Comprehensive Plan, and specifically Maps 7 and 8, as a guide. Coordinate utility extensions with actions regarding annexation and new zoning for annexed areas.
- Work to reduce the overload on the Town’s Wastewater Treatment Plant due to storm water runoff during periods of wet weather.
- Work with other public utilities to address interdependent infrastructure system needs, including fiber optic and Point of Service provisions for high-speed Internet service.
- Address other infrastructure needs in the areas of electricity, telephone, and gas.

O. Vacant Buildings and Land

The objective with regard to vacant buildings and land is to proactively find procedures and solutions to bring them into vital and productive use.

- Evaluate the highest and best use potentials of the Town’s vacant buildings and parcels, consistent with preserving the integrity of surrounding properties and uses, especially residential and parkland.
- Develop new procedures through which the Town, working as appropriate with non-profit and property-owner organizations, can act to halt the deterioration caused by vacant properties.
- Encourage new uses that result in healthy new activity and increase Laurel’s tax base, taking into account the needs of surrounding land uses.

P. Potential Growth and Annexation

It is the objective of the Town of Laurel, and of the Greater Laurel area of which it is a part, to grow at a measured and moderate pace in keeping with its traditional character as a small Delmarva community. Moderate growth will assure quality and compatibility in design between existing and new development. It will also help sustain the natural

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environment, preserve community history and enhance Laurel's economic base for the benefit of future generations. It is also the objective to view annexation as a tool for planned growth and a means of planning for appropriate uses, densities and design. The Town will implement the Growth & Annexation policy expressed in Section V.K above.

❑ Twenty-Year Population Growth And Land Absorption Projection

The 2004 Greater Laurel Comprehensive Plan requires a twenty-year population growth and land absorption projection in order to plan for future development and provide it with adequate municipal services. A rational estimate of future population growth and land absorption is necessary, but it is not wise to believe that it will be absolute. American society places positive values on flexibility and adaptation and on both urban growth and farmland preservation. It is also because of the high rate of growth being experienced by Sussex County. The Town of Laurel wishes to positively participate in this growth for the benefit of its citizens and neighbors.

The following assumptions and projections have been used to approximate future growth for the purposes of the plan.

The Town is assumed to grow within portions of the Potential Growth and Annexation Area that are contiguous with its current municipal boundaries.

During the 1990-2000 time period as measured by Census 2000, the Town of Laurel experienced an average annual growth rate of 1.08%, while Sussex County as a whole experienced an average annual growth rate of 3.8%, almost four times higher than that of Laurel. Laurel's population in April 2000 was 3,668 persons.

The Town's 1990-2000 average annual growth rate of 1.08% lags seriously behind that of its Zip Code Area 19956 and Sussex County as a whole. This growth lag is opposite to the condition desired under the Livable Delaware Program, which seeks to concentrate growth in established areas.

2004 has begun as a year of very low mortgage interest rates (5%) and of high predicted growth in the Gross Domestic Product (4.5%). It can be assumed that Sussex County will continue to grow at a vigorous rate for the foreseeable future. The Delaware Population Consortium has projected an average annual growth rate of 2.8% for Sussex County over the next twenty years.

The goal of the Comprehensive Plan is to help integrate the Town of Laurel into this vigorous growth pattern.

It is assumed that Laurel grew at the same average annual 1.08% growth rate during the four year time period between April 2000, the time of the census 2000 enumeration, and

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April 2004, and that the Town's April 2004 population will be approximately 4,054 persons, an increase of 158 persons since the Year 2000. This population increase has taken place in a time period in which the Town issued 18 building permits for new residential units and 412 permits for the rehabilitation of existing units.

During the three year time period 2004-2007, the Town's wastewater treatment plant upgrade will be under construction and initial operation, and an average annual growth rate of 1.08% has been used during this three-year period.

A 1.08% annual growth rate over the three-year period results a total Town population of 4,185 in 2007, an increase of 131 persons since 2004.

At an average household size of 2.4 persons, and an average residential density of 3 dwelling units per acre, growth of 131 new residents, if accommodated through new housing development, would result in the need for 18 new acres of residential development by 2007.

During the 2008-2024 time period of the Plan, Town growth is projected to be 2.8% per year, the growth rate for Sussex County as a whole during this time period as projected by the Delaware Population Consortium. This means 42% growth over the 15-year period, resulting in 1,758 additional new Town residents by 2024, for a total Town population of 5,943 persons.

Assuming continuation of the long-term trend toward decreasing average household size, and using an assumed average household size of 2.3 persons during this time period, and an increase in the residential density of new projects to 4 dwelling units per acre, growth of 1,758 additional new residents results in the need for 191 new acres of residential development by 2024.

Assuming that fifteen percent of the needed dwelling units can be provided through the redevelopment of existing sites located within the current municipal boundaries, this means that 1,494 new residents would occupy new dwelling units on annexed land, requiring 162 acres of land.

The Future Land Use Plan shows 5 general areas of land that may be suitable for this purpose. Each area is presently in farm use. The 5 areas, shown on the future Land Use Plan as residential/agricultural, total approximately 1,400 acres. The 162 acres needed for residential development represents 12% of the total 1,400 acres in this category.

This is consistent with the basic planning principles described in the Comprehensive Plan: that both annexation and agricultural land preservation are voluntary actions by property-owners, that annexation lands must be contiguous with the municipal boundaries

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they touch, and that significant areas within the boundary will and should remain farmland as part of contiguous blocks of farmland.

- ❑ In keeping with the principle that annexation is voluntary, and that the Town desires annexations as part of its future development, the conditions for annexation need to be made attractive. Through adopting progressive zoning, generally demonstrating good positive government, and implementing selected public improvements along the edges of Town, annexation can be encouraged. Once one or more property owners have requested annexation, the Town should evaluate the proposal in keeping with the standards set forth in House Bill 255. These include adequacy and cost of the services that the Town would provide to the newly annexed area. The benefits to the Town of annexation should be carefully weighed. The Town should seek to enter into annexation agreements in which the annexed area is contiguous with Town boundaries and connected to its street system. These types of fragmentary annexations lead to fragmentation of services and confusion as to neighborhood political representation.
- ❑ Implement the Town's goal of connecting with Route 13 by directing utility extensions to selected intersections, or "corridors", where there is interest in annexation and large parcels for redevelopment.
- ❑ Adopt the Potential Growth and Annexation Area Element included in this Comprehensive Plan in accordance with HB 255. This will then serve as the basis for annexation policy. Treat the boundary shown on the map as the basis for a future Town Growth Boundary and Greenbelt for Laurel.
- ❑ Consider appropriate incentives for annexation in cases where annexation is desirable. Incentives might include paying for advertisement costs or partial payment of a portion of water and sewer connection and assessment costs at such time as the property owner requests connection to these systems.