

Town of  
**LAUREL**  
DELAWARE

# REIMAGINING LAUREL

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2018

## FINAL PLAN





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# Introduction and guiding principles

# 1

## A TOWN AT A CRITICAL CROSSROADS

Laurel is a town on the brink of reimagining itself. The choices that its leaders make in the coming months and next few years have the potential to transform it into a town where more people will live, work and visit - with an attractive mix of housing choices, small businesses and light manufacturing jobs, and a revitalized waterfront.

The potential for Laurel to be recognized as a launching pad for nature-based and heritage tourism is profound. Nestled in the Nanticoke watershed, it is waiting to be discovered by birders, paddlers, cyclists, history buffs, people who hunt and fish, and nature photographers.



**LAUREL**<sup>TM</sup>  
Great Things Come Naturally

*Laurel's brand was developed with community input in 2016 by Arnett, Muldrow and Associates. Below, Laurel became a Downtown Development District in 2016.*



Laurel is poised for a rebirth of its business district and Broad Creek waterfront with its designation as a Downtown Development District and the continued work of the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation. The town needs to adopt a laser focus on the Central Avenue and Market Street corridor. Also, the town should aggressively address dilapidated properties that have been vacant for years, as well as landlords who are chronic violators of the town's codes. They pose a health and safety hazard to residents, as well as a deterrent to new investment and Laurel's reputation as a haven for history.

Laurel needs to grow and diversify its tax base.. But it is critical that town leaders take a long view. After all, it took decades for Laurel, once the most prosperous town in Delaware, to experience these 21st-Century challenges. What appears to be a quick fix could damage the town's character and severely strain town services and infrastructure. Likewise, the town should safeguard Broad Creek, its most valuable natural assets, from development that threatens water quality and Laurel's verdant riverside tree canopy.

Laurel's municipal boundaries are somewhat confusing – especially along the U.S. 13 corridor. The town should consider filling in those enclaves to ensure that the commercial development it seeks along its highway corridor will actually locate within town limits. It needs to address unsightly properties at gateways into the town.

### Beyond a bedroom community

Laurel is essentially functioning as a bedroom community. Remarkably, according to the U.S. Census, only 78 people both live and work in the town. There is an “invisible”

younger population that lives in Laurel's subsidized housing complexes and relatively cheap rentals but works elsewhere. They are not invested in the town, present or future. Yet they are citizens, and their children are attending Laurel's schools.

These are challenges, but it shows community spirit, resolve and foresight to recognize them and agree on a plan for moving forward. This plan lays out those challenges, as well as promising opportunities. It provides recommendations framed by guiding principles that were developed by citizens and leaders during a lengthy public engagement process.

### Why we plan

A municipality in Delaware is required to update its comprehensive plan every 10 years, according to Title 22, Chapter 7, Section 702 of the Delaware Code. Laurel's was last updated in 2011, but the town chose to revisit it early because of significant developments occurring within its borders.

The code lays out specific elements that must be included in a town's comprehensive plan (see *State of Delaware Comprehensive Plan Checklist*). The plan is reviewed by the Office of State Planning Coordination and state agencies through the Preliminary Land Use Service. If the plan meets state requirements, it is certified by the Governor.

More important than crossing off items on a checklist is ensuring that the plan is a living and readable document that represents the realities, as well as the vision, of the Town of Laurel. It should not be steeped in jargon, but written in plain language. If necessary, this plan will define or explain terms that planners and agency staff may take for granted.

The plan also must be realistic in its recommendations and implementation schedule. Laurel is a small, rural town with limited capacity for absorbing, prioritizing and executing a litany of recommendations. This plan groups recommendations by the Guiding Principles that will be discussed in the next section and focuses on how the town can reasonably implement them.

### Public engagement began in 2012

The leaders and residents of Laurel have been engaged in thinking about the future of the town since discussions began in 2012 about how to protect water quality along Broad Creek in light of new federal water-quality standards. That discussion evolved into a vision for redevelopment along Broad Creek called The Ramble. The Ramble plan was unveiled at Laurel's Public Library on September 18, 2014. It will be discussed later in this plan, but it is a vision for mixed-use redevelopment that includes a Village Green, waterfront cottages, a nature-based playground, a kayak launch, an outdoor

**The Laurel Plan Advisory Team, appointed by Town Council, helped guide the plan's development.**



wetlands education classroom and other features that make waterfront redevelopment attractive while safeguarding water quality and avoiding the floodplain.

The Ramble plan is becoming a reality. Laurel’s Downtown Development District application process began in late 2014, building on that vision for Laurel’s central core and waterfront. The town is applying for a Strong Neighborhoods Fund grant to improve the blighted Old Town neighborhood immediately adjacent to The Ramble footprint.

Laurel’s planning team, which includes the University of Delaware’s Sustainable Coastal Communities program, secured Delaware Economic Development Office (DEDO) resources for a “Better Block” community engagement effort that brought The Ramble to life for a day in September 2015. A “Reimagine Laurel” website was launched to include information about The Ramble, the Downtown Development District, the comprehensive plan, and other related initiatives.

Ben Muldrow of Arnett, Muldrow and Associates was engaged to help the town develop and launch a new brand. Those DEDO resources also were used to engage Community Conservation Consultants to work with community leaders on a strategy for making Laurel a “base camp” for nature and heritage tourism in the Nanticoke region.

In March 2016, the Laurel Town Council and Laurel Planning and Zoning Commission kicked off the comprehensive plan update. The Town Council appointed a Laurel Plan Advisory Team to help guide the efforts of the consultant, Cedar Creek Sustainable Planning Services. As of November 2016, the advisory team has met five times at the Laurel Public Library. The consultant used Orton Foundation’s Community Heart and Soul resources to guide the work and decision-making of the Advisory Team.

The Plan Advisory Team developed an online survey that was launched in June 2016. From those 355 responses and interviews conducted with town leaders, citizens and business owners, the Advisory Team developed and approved six Guiding Principles that would drive the comprehensive plan’s recommendations.

In August 2016, 72 acres of Laurel’s downtown core were designated as a Downtown Development District.

In September 2016, Conservation Community Consultants presented their nature/heritage tourism strategy to Town Council. Also that month, Town Council heard extensive recommendations for growing while protecting water quality along Broad Creek – the original topic that initiated all the public discussion and participation back in 2012.

In October 2016, the town and Laurel Redevelopment Corporation held a workshop and tour in conjunction with the LRC’s Strong Neighborhoods Fund application.

As the plan is written, key findings and concepts are being shared in blog posts on the Reimagine Laurel website.

All these efforts engaged town leaders, citizens, nonprofits and business owners in a focused conversation about how their town should grow. They built on, corroborated and amplified each other. Laurel has articulated a very clear path for redevelopment and growth and how to accomplish it.

The survey

The Laurel Plan Advisory Team developed a community survey that was launched online via Survey Monkey on June 24, 2016. The 28-question survey was promoted on the Reimagine Laurel website, by the town in a press release and mailings, and by posters and business cards distributed throughout the town.

The survey generated 355 responses. About 29 percent of the respondents lived within the town limits, another 41 percent lived outside the town but within the 19956 zip code, and 40 percent lived outside Laurel’s town limits and zip code.

The respondents were presented with a set of values to rank, which led to the guiding principles discussed below. The raw survey results for these weighted values are shown in Figure 1.1. They demonstrated a clear desire for the town to grow (63%) rather than to remain roughly the same size (37%). They indicated a clear preference for “more unique shopping within Laurel’s business district” (64%) over “familiar chain retail stores along U.S. 13” (36%).

They were almost equally split over whether to focus on repairing and improving roads in town (53%) or on providing more opportunities to walk and bike safely (47%). They expressed a very strong preference for “filling in vacant areas and fixing up historic properties” (81%) vs. “new single-family homes in new subdivisions” (19%).



Above, posters and business cards were distributed in an effort to promote the community survey. Below left, a “wordle” featuring most common responses from the comments portion of the survey.



**All recommendations in this plan will conform with the Guiding Principles developed and adopted by the Laurel Plan Advisory Team.**

They also had the opportunity to open-endedly discuss what was most important to them about Laurel, what is the town’s biggest strength, what would they like to see happen in Laurel in the next 5-10 years, and what concerns them the most about Laurel today.

A [presentation](#) on the survey results is available on the [Reimagine Laurel](#) website. So are complete [survey results](#).

### The Guiding Principles

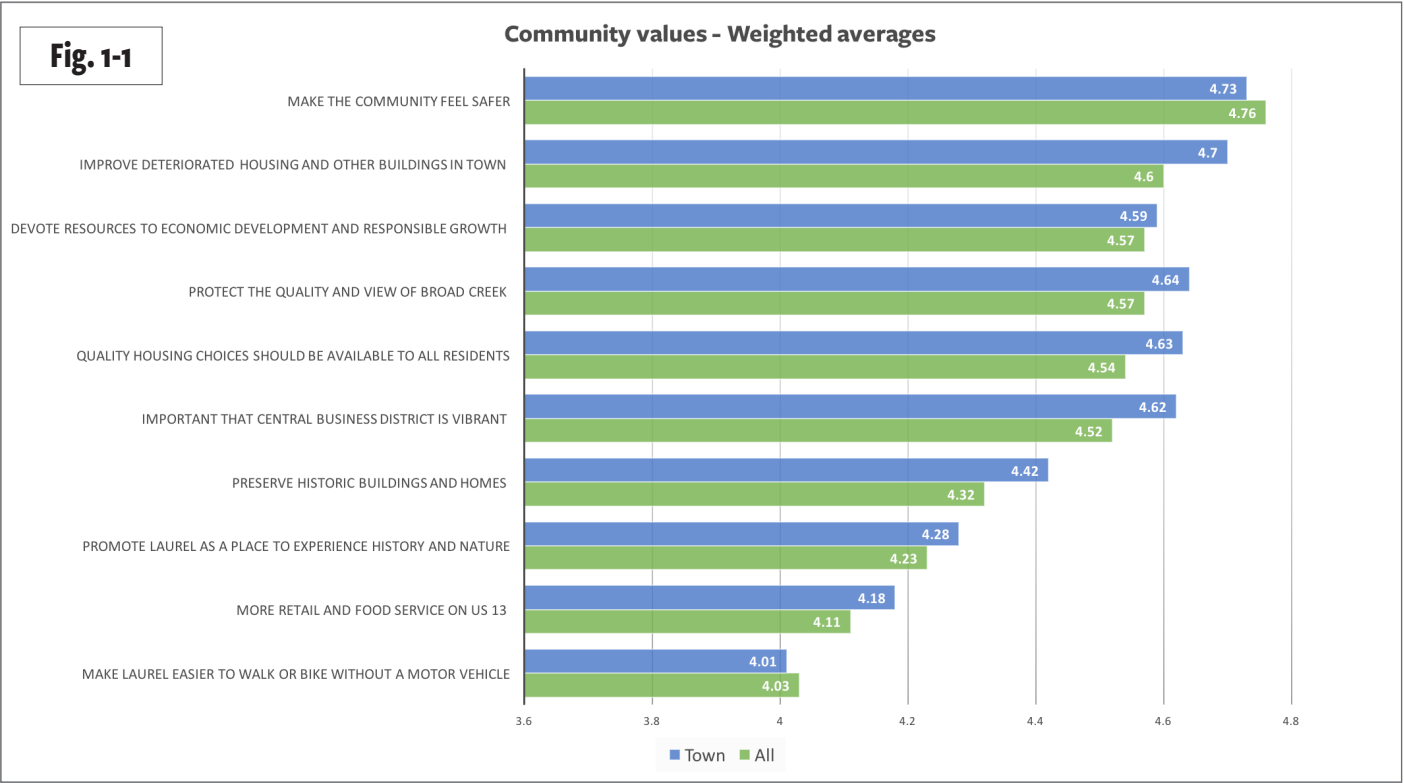
On July 21, 2016, the Laurel Plan Advisory Team met at the Laurel Public Library to draft and approve a set of Guiding Principles. Any recommendations for the comprehensive plan would be weighed against these principles.

- *We will be a close-knit community that creates walkable streets, safe neighborhoods and attractive public places so that all our residents feel secure and confident about their town.*
- *We will improve the appearance of Laurel’s homes, commercial buildings and properties to honor our history, build community pride and attract new residents and businesses.*
- *We will attract a strategic mix of new small businesses, entrepreneurs, small manufacturers and shopping that will provide quality employment for our citizens and meet community needs.*
- *We recognize Broad Creek as our greatest natural asset and a focal point for recreation, relaxation, nature tourism and sustainable waterfront development.*
- *We will encourage home ownership and housing choices, via both restoration and new development compatible with Laurel’s community character, to attract new residents and raise the standard of living for all our citizens.*
- *We value our downtown as the heart of Laurel’s identity, history and commerce and are committed to redeveloping it as our hub for economic growth, tourism and small-town living.*

These principles reflect the town’s position on community character and on critical community development issues. More data will be provided to enforce these aspirational statements.



A Laurel Plan Advisory Team meeting at the Public Library. Below, results from the community survey indicate what both residents and non-residents value about Laurel.







# Demographics and economic conditions

# 2

## AN “INVISIBLE” POPULATION THAT IS YOUNG AND STRUGGLING

People may be surprised to learn that Laurel is a very young town, with a median age of only 27.7, according to the U.S. Census 2010-2014 American Community Survey. The largest age cohort is under 5 years; it comprises 14.5 percent of the town’s population. This bubble is likely to pose a strain on Laurel’s school district in the near future, as the district is already near capacity with its three new schools.

These younger Laurel residents comprise an “invisible” population that mostly works outside the town limits. They live in one of Laurel’s four subsidized housing complexes, or in the relatively cheap rentals that represent about 45 percent of Laurel’s housing.

In fact, only 78 people actually live and work within the town limits—out of a workforce of 1,746. The top five work destinations for Laurel residents by zip code are Seaford 19973 (13.3%), Laurel 19956 (7.8%), Salisbury 21801 (6.8%), Georgetown (6.5%) and Millsboro (6.0%). The average travel time to work is 28 minutes.

With this daily exodus of workers, Laurel essentially functions as a bedroom community— but not in the traditional suburban sense. This creates a dynamic where a large, younger segment of the population does not feel vested in the town or its future.

They are relatively poor and isolated in their work and housing conditions. By the destinations of their daily commute (see Figure 2.2), it appears likely that many are working in poultry processing operations. They have a lot of young children.

If they are invisible, poor and not participating in community life, it becomes more unlikely that Laurel’s town and school taxpayers will support them and their children, or that they themselves will have the capacity to help Laurel lift itself from its challenging demographics. Almost a quarter of Laurel’s families were below the poverty rate in 2014, and almost 43 percent were receiving food stamps.

## POPULATION 1960-2014

Year	Population	% Change
1960	2,709	--
1970	2,403	-11.3
1980	3,052	+27.0
1990	3,312	+8.5
2000	3,668	+10.5
2010	3,708	+1.2
2014	3,842	+3.6

Fig. 2.1

## TOP 10 COMMUTING DESTINATIONS

	Zip code	Count	Share
1	19973 Seaford	233	13.3
2	19956 Laurel	137	7.8
3	21801 Salisbury, Md.	118	6.8
4	19947 Georgetown	113	6.5
5	19966 Millsboro	105	6.0
6	19901 Dover	76	4.4
7	21804 Salisbury, Md.	75	4.3
8	19720 New Castle	61	3.5
9	19904 Dover	51	2.9
10	19975 Selbyville	46	2.6

## INCOME AND POVERTY

Statistics	Laurel	Delaware
Median household income	\$33,387	\$60,231
Poverty rate, last 12 months - all families	24.7%	8.2%
Poverty rate, last 12 months - single female household head	54.8%	23.3%
Receiving SNAP/Food stamps	42.6%	12.7%
% Unemployed	10.2%	8.5%
% Rental	43.9%	28.4%
% Vacant housing units	11.3%	17.6%
% Low-moderate income	50%	37.8%

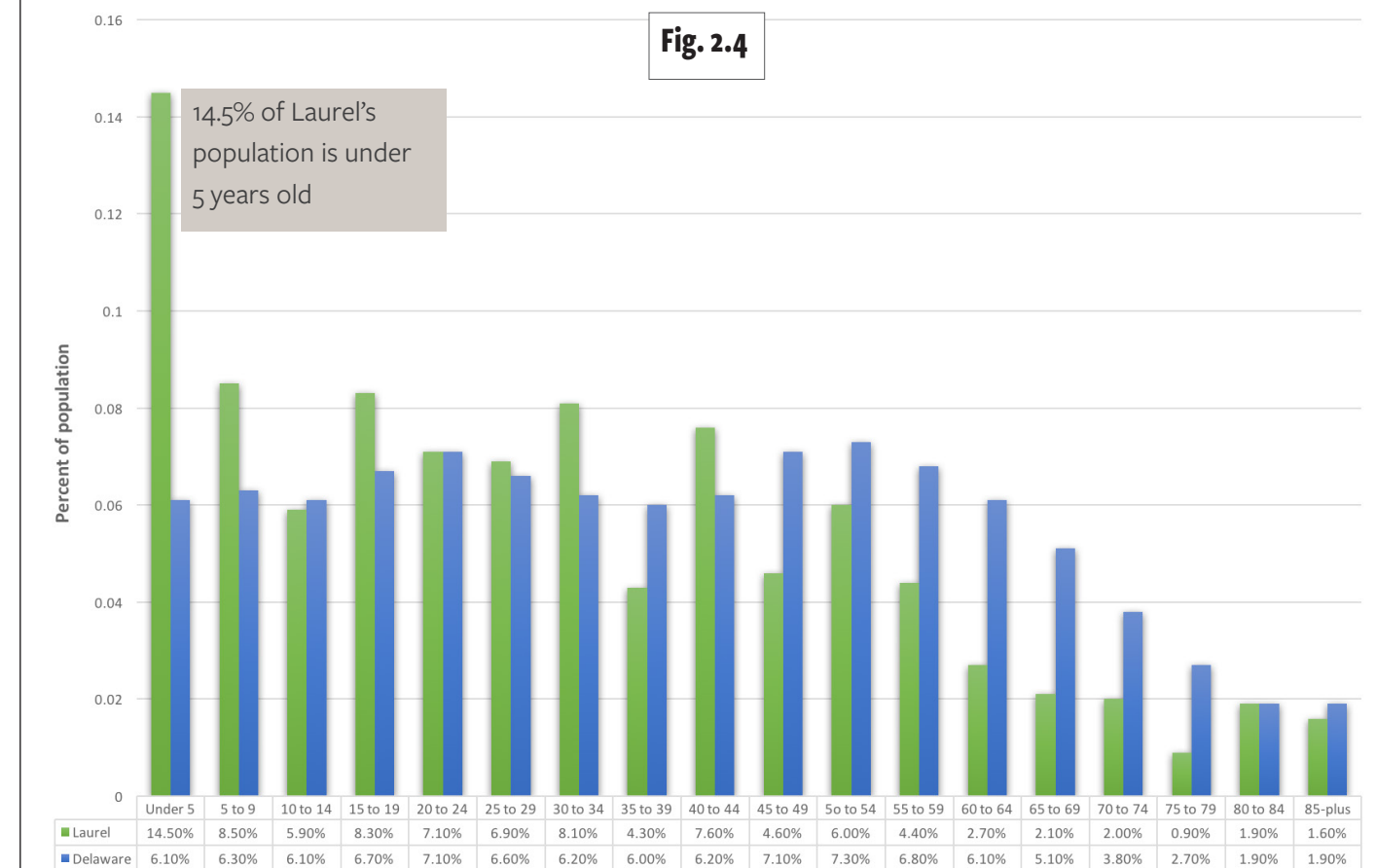
Fig. 2.2

Fig. 2.3

All Census data are from the 2010-2014 American Community Survey.

## Laurel's Age Bubble

Fig. 2.4



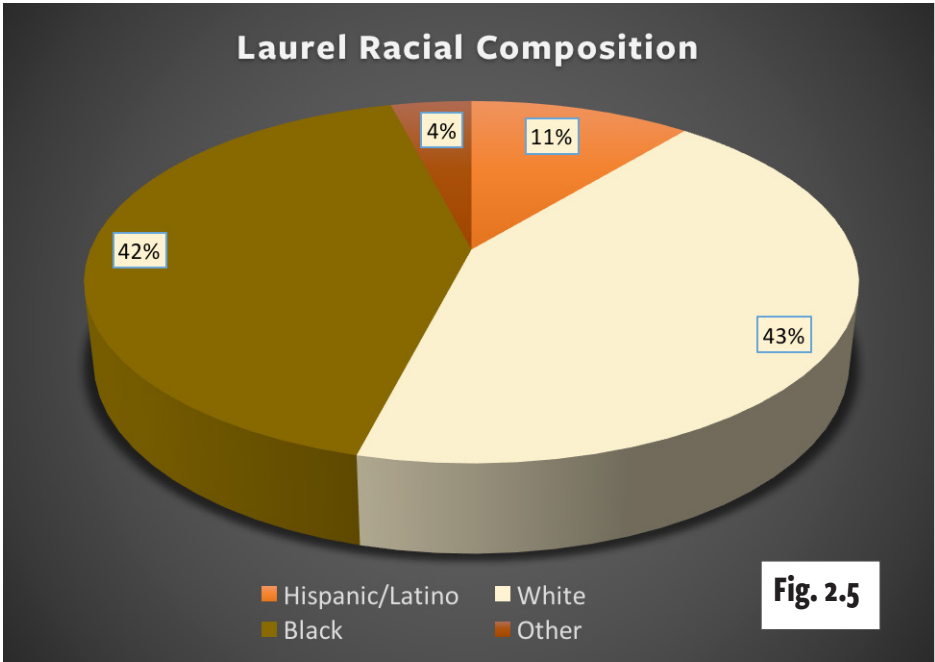


Almost half of Laurel’s population with a mortgage are spending more than 30 percent of their income on housing costs, an indicator that they are struggling to make ends meet.

Out of 914 families in Laurel, 90 were earning between \$100,000 and \$149,999. No family was earning more than \$150,000, according to the Census data.

Racial composition

Racially, Laurel has a minority white population. According to the 2010-2014 American Community Survey, 43 percent of residents are white; 42 percent are African-American; 11 percent are Hispanic/Latino; and 4 percent are other.



Employment in Laurel

In 2014, there were 956 full-time primary jobs within Laurel’s town limits, according to the U.S. Census Bureau’s Center for Economic Studies. A primary job is defined as the job that earned an individual the most money.

According to the center’s Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics Program, only 78 of those jobs are held by residents of Laurel. Every work day, 1,668 Laurel residents leave the town limits to work somewhere else, and 878 workers come from outside the town limits to work in Laurel.

The three largest industry sectors within Laurel are health care and social assistance (14.9%), retail trade (14.7%), and manufacturing (14.5%). The detailed chart in Figure 2.5 shows how residents of Laurel are employed, whether or not those jobs are in Laurel. The civilian employed population over 16 totals 1,460.

Industries and occupations for Laurel age 16 and older (2010-2014)

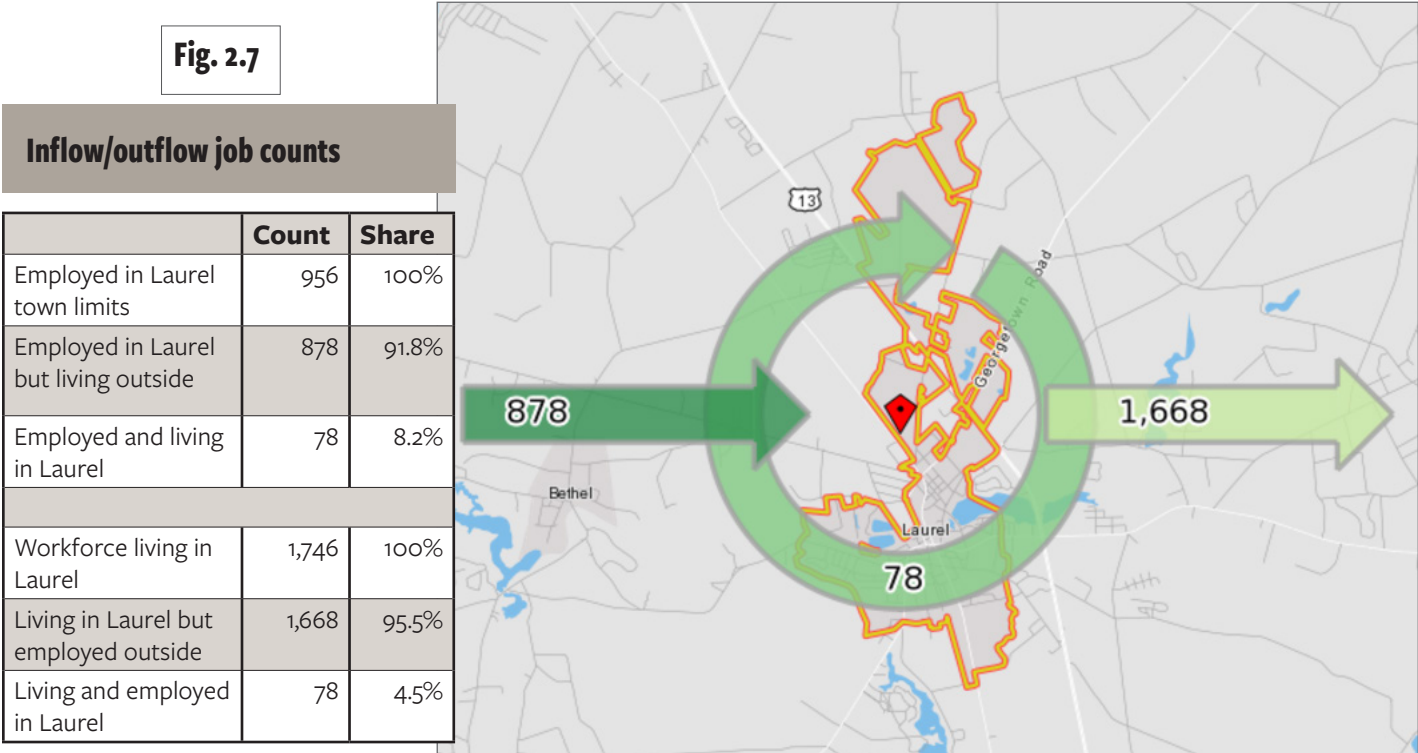
Fig. 2.6

Category	Total	Management, business, science, and arts occupations	Service occupations	Sales and office occupations	Natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations	Production, transportation, and material moving occupations
Civilian employed population 16 years and over	1,460	14.7%	26.9%	24.5%	8.8%	25.0%
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	21	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%
Construction	47	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%
Manufacturing	227	0.0%	3.1%	0.0%	0.0%	96.9%
Wholesale trade	46	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	73.9%	26.1%
Retail trade	363	0.0%	9.4%	70.2%	3.0%	17.4%
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	35	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	45.7%	54.3%
Information	0	-	-	-	-	-
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	47	10.6%	14.9%	74.5%	0.0%	0.0%
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	61	0.0%	78.7%	0.0%	0.0%	21.3%
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	340	43.5%	44.7%	11.8%	0.0%	0.0%
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	172	8.1%	69.8%	4.1%	0.0%	18.0%
Other services, except public administration	66	53.0%	28.8%	18.2%	0.0%	0.0%
Public administration	35	37.1%	17.1%	25.7%	0.0%	20.0%
PERCENT IMPUTED						
Industry	11.1%	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)	(X)

Industries (left column) are based on the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS). Occupational codes (top row) are based on Standard Occupational Classification 2010. The smaller the sample, the higher the potential for error. **Note:** The numbers for employed civilians in this chart (1,460) differs from the Center for Economic Studies table’s total of 1,746 (Fig. 2.6) because they represent a five-year survey average (2010-2014), and the CES numbers are only for 2014.



See Fig. 2.7 at left for a rough breakdown of Laurel’s largest employers. Laurel’s employment picture and economic development are discussed in Chapter Six.



Source: Center for Economic Studies, U.S. Census Bureau

Position on population growth

Laurel’s leadership and citizens would like to see the town grow. Over the past decade growth has been slow. A large development that would have brought more than 1,800 residential units to the northernmost section of town east of U.S. 13 fell through during the recession.

Because Laurel is skewed toward a younger population, the town should consider a growth strategy that includes pre-retirement and retirement-age adults, as well as residents who can work from their home and choose to live a small-town life. These could be people who enjoy outdoor pursuits, such as kayaking and birding and can take an active role in their community.

These people are already finding their way to Laurel. They may be more interested in renovating an existing historic home than in purchasing a new home in a subdivision. The town is headed in that direction with its nature and heritage tourism economic development strategy and plans to revitalize the waterfront and central business district — including the development of a pocket neighborhood of cottages on Broad Creek.

Laurel needs to transform itself from a bedroom community with an invisible, disengaged population to a truly complete community with engaged citizens who work in town, own a business, or are actively retired and enjoying the recreational opportunities in and around Laurel.

Planned, steady population growth that follows this plan and includes Laurel’s central core, development of commercial parcels along US 13 and careful build-out far from Laurel’s central core is preferable to reactive, “leap-frog” growth that could strain town services.

A long-term buildout

The University of Delaware Sustainable Coastal Communities Initiative, Office of State Planning Coordination, and town leaders worked together in 2013-14 to visualize how and where Laurel should grow. Innovative, hands-on mapping techniques were used to define a study area and guide participants to suggest where different types of growth should occur. The land-use modeling process used a set of 100-acre tiles or squares to describe the land uses of a particular area.

Each 100-acre square represents a community of varying land uses and housing densities – either in existence today or as a possibility in the future. The communities represented include:

- **Rural Communities** (a 100-acre farm or natural preserve; 5-20 acre farms or agricultural business; or a rural village);
- **Residential Communities** (a suburban community of single-family and/or multi-family homes, such as Suburban T4 depicted in Fig. 2.9 below);
- **Mixed-Use Communities** with both residential and non-residential properties and
- **Non-residential Communities** (Employment Centers such as business parks, large schools and institutions, or government centers and regional retail centers).

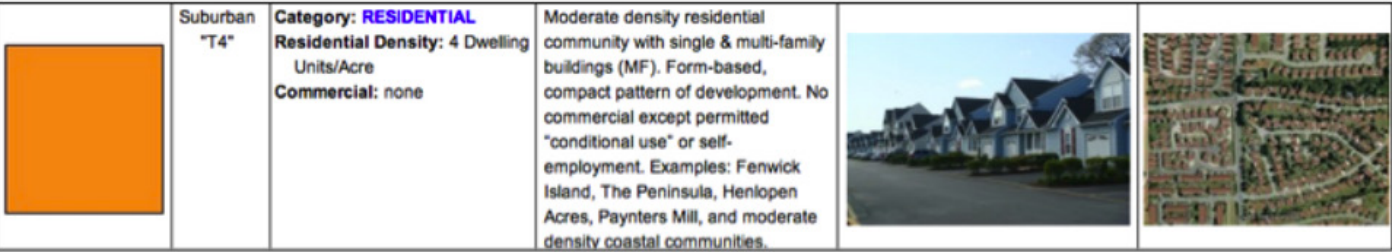


Fig. 2.9 Visualizing what the T4 suburban tile will look like built out, on the ground. Source: University of Delaware

Fig. 2.8

Top employers in Laurel		
	Employer	No.
1	Laurel school district	271
2	Food Lion	65
3	Town of Laurel	32
4	D&C Auto Sales	32
5	Schwan’s Home Service	30
6	US Postal Service	26
7	Insurance Market	24
8	Health and Social Services - Poplar St.	22
9	M&T Bank	22

Source: Delaware Economic Development Office. This table lists only the top 9, as there are many businesses cited with 20 employees.



Rural Communities are the least dense, at one dwelling unit per 100 acres. The spectrum continues through low-density rural development to suburban to mixed use to commercial uses.

After the town visualized and mapped Laurel’s future using the 100-acre land-use tiles, the University generated a parcel-based map. The map at right visualizes Laurel’s growth over a period of decades. The proposed annexation area is bounded with a red line.

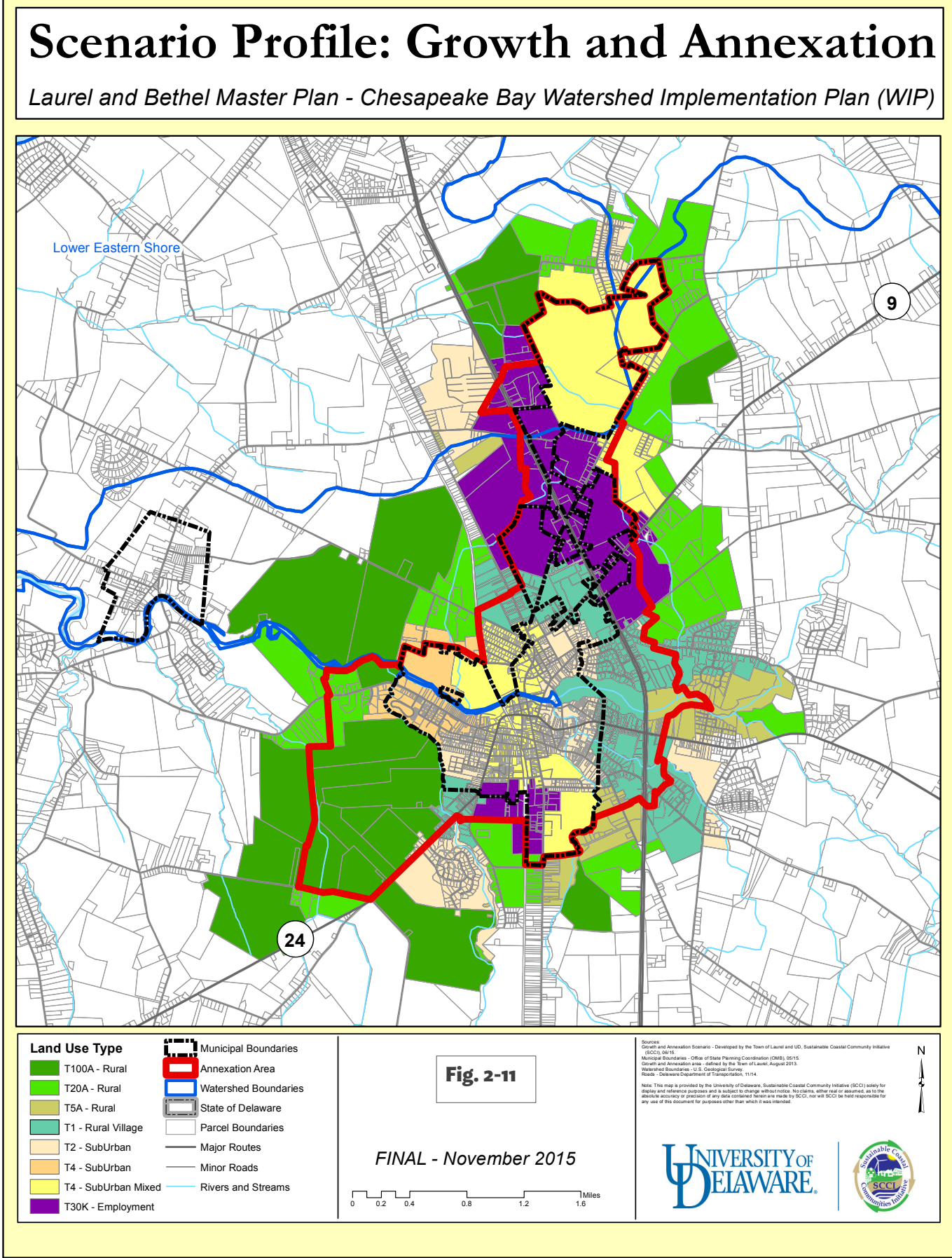
The University and Office of State Planning Coordination agreed on a set of assumptions to generate the buildout table below. The “Growth and Annexation Scenario” matches the map at right. The map shows land-use types, but is not a zoning map. The buildout scenarios do not include the longer-term annexation areas depicted in the 2011 plan and shown on page 93.

What buildout will look like in Laurel study area

Fig. 2-10

Name	Base Build-Out Scenario (on the ground in 2014)	Future Land Use per town and county plans	Growth and Annexation scenario
Children	2,973	4,888	5,306
Commercial floor area	2,252,765 square feet	3,707,034 square feet	3,767,700 square feet
Commercial daily vehicle travel	58,411 miles	100,775 miles	101,561 miles
Commercial wastewater (gpd)	103,397	155,764	161,552
Commercial water use (gpd)	129,246	194,705	201,940
Dwelling units	4,520	8,240	9,280
Employees	5,185	7,929	8,390
Residential property taxes	\$429,199	\$805,396	\$911,798
Residential daily vehicle travel	45,200 miles	82,400 miles	92,800 miles
Residential wastewater use (gpd)	1,275,997	2,181,991	2,453,994
Residential water use (gpd)	1,275,997	2,181,991	2,453,994
Residents	11,532	21,635	24,050

**Fig. 2-10.** This table forecasts buildout in the study area (Fig. 2-11) for three different scenarios. The Base Buildout Scenario reflects land-use conditions as they existed in 2014. The Future Land Use scenario is based on the comprehensive plans of Sussex County and the Town of Laurel. The Growth and Annexation Scenario represents a revised buildout based on the visioning exercise conducted with the University of Delaware and the Office of State Planning Coordination. It will be incorporated into the 2016 update of Laurel’s comprehensive plan. **Source:** University of Delaware





# Downtown Development District and Community Design 3



Detailed recommendations for each chapter will be included in the *Recommendations* section of the comprehensive plan.

## REVITALIZING LAUREL'S CORE

Laurel's core business district and waterfront was designated as a Downtown Development District in August 2016. The 72-acre district includes the Market Street and Central Avenue corridor that includes two banks, many large historic homes, the public library, several parks, historic as well as storefront churches, and the Laurel-towne office park and other Laurel Redevelopment Corporation projects, such as Abbots on Broad Creek and the Villas on Broad Creek.

This district represents Laurel's targeted redevelopment area, with a 30-year history of investment by the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation, several projects underway, and strategic acquisitions and investments planned. The town and LRC are seeking grants, such as Strong Neighborhoods Housing Fund, Neighborhood Building Blocks and DelDOT's Transportation Alternatives Program to continue to transform this district.

It includes the Old Town neighborhood that was town's original sector and is a focus of community improvement and rehabilitation efforts. The DDD also includes the waterfront area envisioned for The Ramble, a planned mixed-use community that includes a village green, waterfront cottages, a nature-based playground, kayak launch and walking trails. Except for the parcels along the waterfront, the entire DDD is within Laurel's historic district.

As specified in the Downtown Development District plan, the overall vision is to enhance the commercial viability, walkability and livability of Laurel's core. The following key priorities will help Laurel achieve that vision:

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

Each of these priorities has several supporting objectives.

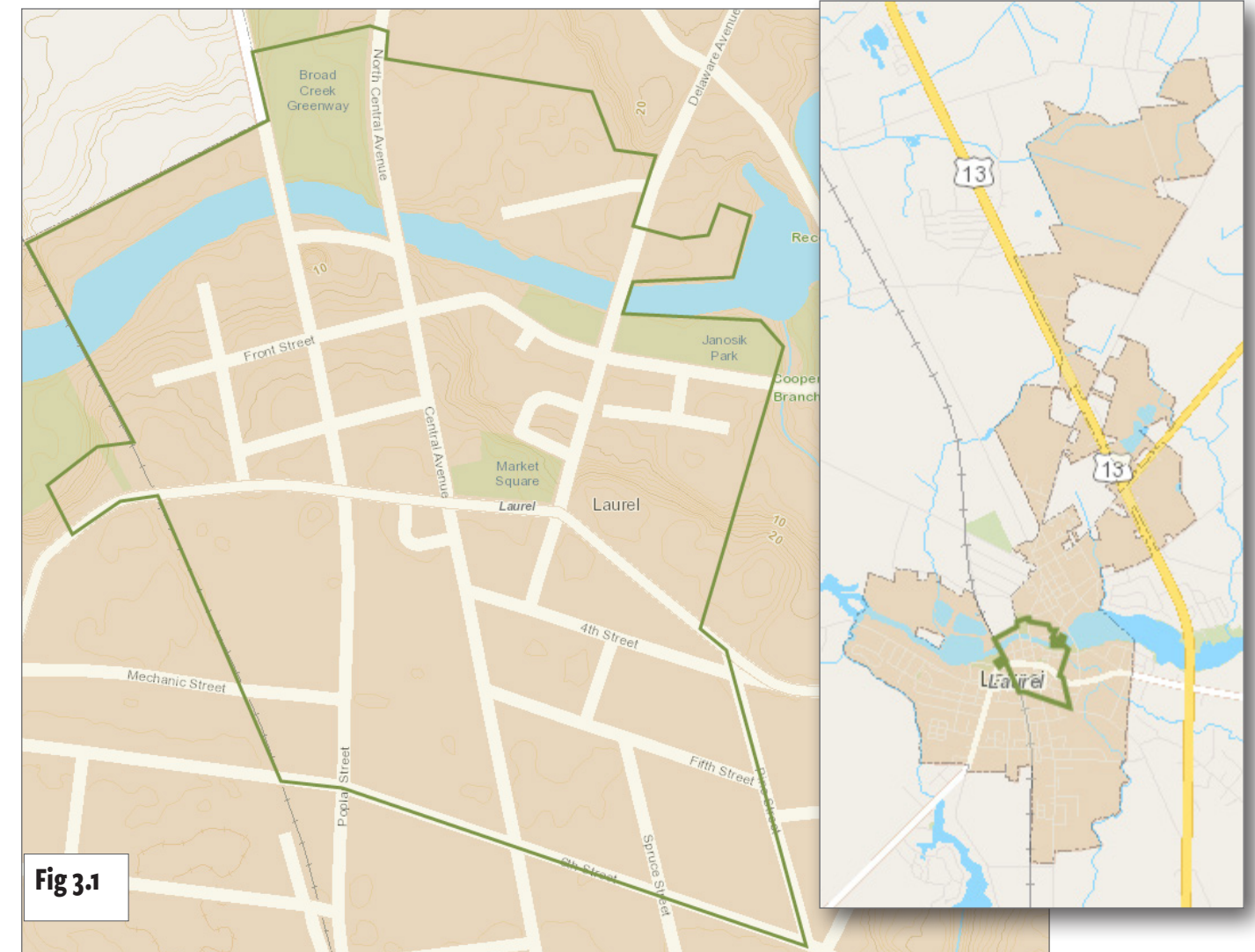


Fig 3.1

## Category 1: Adjust zoning and permitted land uses

After Laurel's comprehensive plan was updated in 2011, the town adopted a new zoning code. However, the Planning and Zoning Commission and town leadership recognize that the town's zoning code needs to be further revised and updated to reflect best practices and changing priorities, especially in the downtown area.

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

The area that includes the proposed Ramble is zoned as a Marine Resources district, which also fits the planned land use for this area. This district "recognizes the unique role which Broad Creek and its waterfront areas have played in the formation,

Above, Laurel's Downtown Development District with inset map of Laurel.

growth and life of The Town of Laurel,” the town’s code states. The purpose is to preserve the view and tree canopy, buffer property and residents from flooding, protect water quality, and control erosion along the shoreline.

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

For example, Town Center allows stand-alone bars and nightclubs; none presently exists within this zoning category. Permitted uses could be modified to allow brewpubs, wine bars or similar establishments that serve meals.

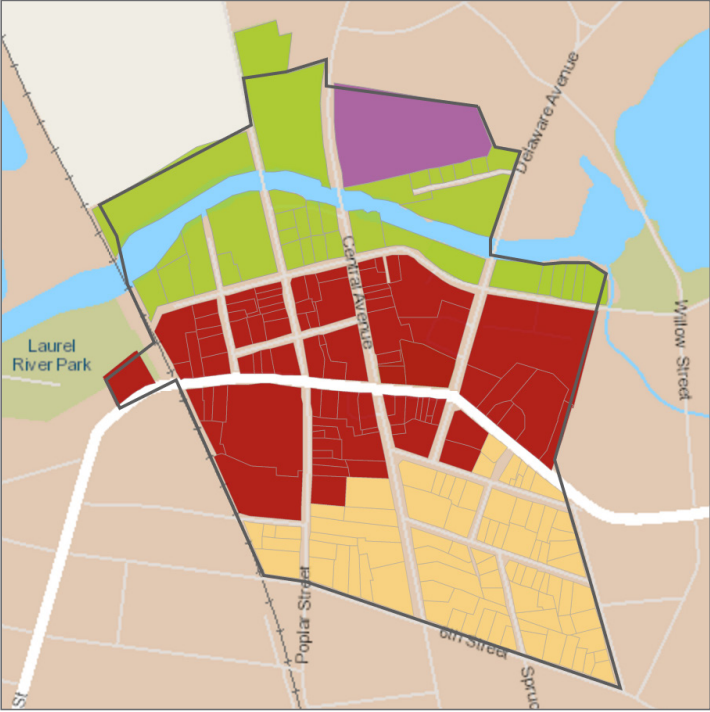
Other uses currently permitted within T-C, such as self-service laundries and amusement centers, should be reconsidered. Uses such as pocket neighborhoods and bed and breakfast establishments should be allowed as a special permitted use subject to adopted design and landscaping standards. The town should consider allowing but regulating short-term vacation rentals, such as Airbnb.

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



Zoning categories: Town-Center T-C), Marine-Resources (M-R), Commercial (C-1) and medium density residential (R-2)

**Fig. 3.2**



The commercial district within the DDD includes some vacant storefronts and establishments that do not maintain regular business hours. These buildings make the area unattractive to passersby and contradict the stated purpose of the Town Center district. These issues can be addressed in a revision of the town’s zoning code.

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

More immediately, however, the town needs to adopt measures that address properties that have been vacant for years, some more than a decade. Many are eyesores that can also pose a public health and safety hazard, and deter new investment in the town. The town also needs to adopt tougher measures against landlords who are chronic violators of the town’s codes and view fines as the cost of doing business.

**Reviewing zoning within the Downtown Development District**

With some adjustments to its zoning ordinance, the town would ensure that its code is conducive to achieving the goals of the Downtown Development District. Like the rest of this comprehensive plan, recommendations for the DDD are scaled to the size and capacity of a town such as Laurel to implement them.

After discussion with town leaders, a land-use attorney and the Office of State Planning Coordination, this plan suggests the Town review zoning within the entire Downtown District. Within the DDD, homes and business are mixed together and depend on each other. Permitting and encouraging additional uses such as bed and breakfast establishments, home offices, accessory dwelling units, and low-impact professional offices (for example, lawyers and small nonprofits) could lead to more vitality within the downtown and rehabilitation of historic residential properties.

Permitted uses within the Marine Resources district should be reviewed to ensure they are compatible with the stated purpose of the zone. Uses should not degrade water quality, require excessive tree removal, aggravate erosion, or be incompatible with the town’s Guiding Principles. Tree canopy requirements, green stormwater infrastructure, and setbacks from the water should be considered.

**Market Street-Central Avenue Corridor**

Market Street (Del. 24) is the main east-west corridor through town, and Central Avenue is the main north-south corridor. Market Street is lined with two banks, a few thriving businesses and a town park—but also with storefront churches, homes

To view a story map of vacant properties within Laurel’s Downtown Development District, go to: <http://arcg.is/2dhfluH>





in severe disrepair, and many vacant buildings that don't invite walkers. Central Avenue is lined with large historic homes and churches, but also with abandoned properties, including a certified brownfield site, and rental units that occupy much of the Code Enforcement Unit's time.

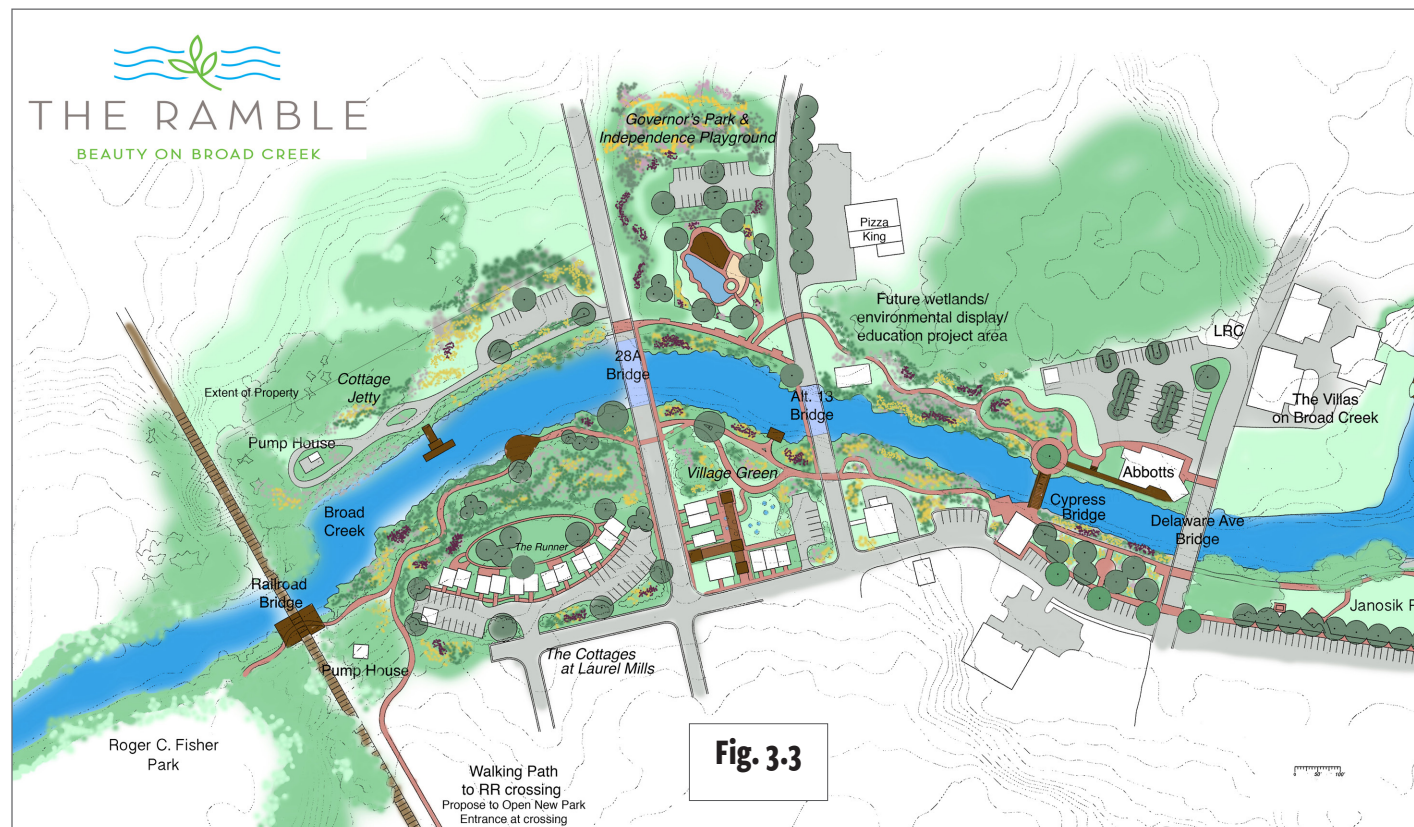
An aerial view reveals how much of the historic downtown has been lost due to demolition of commercial buildings and construction of parking lots. Losing any more buildings will continue to erode the character of Laurel's business and historic district.

Enhanced attention for this Historic Core Corridor, which is within the Downtown Development District, should include a "carrot and stick" approach to improving commercial and residential properties, preserving historic homes, encouraging new businesses, and enhancing walkability. A memo detailing proposed ordinances and actions was provided to the Mayor and Council.

### ***The need for a mixed-use zone beyond downtown***

Reviewing the first draft of this plan indicated the need for the town to revise its zoning code to include a mixed-use zone in addition to the downtown Town-Center category. This zone would permit a mix of residential and businesses uses beyond the town center. Such a category would replace the town's Large Parcel Overlay District and allow for "town-like" pedestrian-oriented development.

*Below, The Ramble plan evolved from an intensive community engagement process.*



**Fig. 3.3**

According to [Placemakers](#), such communities "layer compatible land uses, public amenities, and utilities together at various scales and intensities. This variety of uses allows for people to live, work, play and shop in one place, which then becomes a destination for people from other neighborhoods."

The Large Parcel Overlay District, like many overlays, can be problematic in that they sit on top of another zone with requirements and permitted uses that are not uniform to the underlying zoning category (e.g., Medium-Density Residential) throughout the town. A Mixed-Use Zoning category would allow flexibility in lot size and coverage, density, uses and building styles for developments in other areas of Laurel beyond the downtown. It would promote a human-scale walkable neighborhoods.

### **Category 2: Bring The Ramble redevelopment project to life**

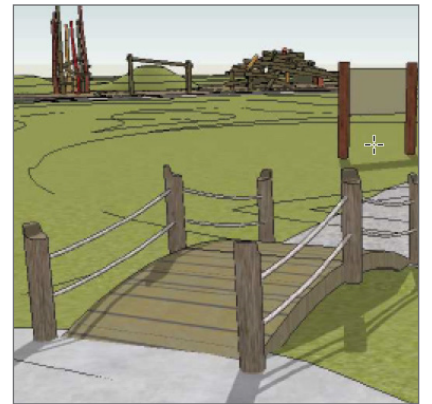
A robust public engagement effort gave birth to The Ramble. The University of Delaware's Sustainable Coastal Communities Initiative was asked to facilitate a community visioning process focusing on the Broad Creek waterfront in Laurel's downtown commercial district. UD initially became involved to lead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

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

Subsequently, a unique partnership orchestrated by UD between the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation and Dr. Bruck, an assistant professor of landscape architecture at the University of Delaware and her students resulted in a conceptual site plan and artist renderings offered in a sustainable waterfront redevelopment proposal —The Ramble.

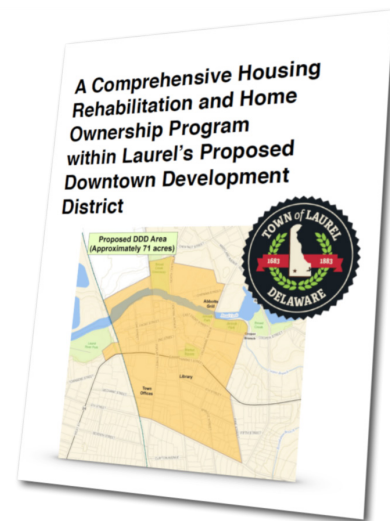
This proposal featured green infrastructure that supported many of the design elements the stakeholder group had suggested for the available properties, 95 percent of which are owned by the LRC or the town. The plan was enthusiastically endorsed by the LRC, the Town council and the Laurel Chamber of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

In September 2015, the community and visitors had a chance to plan and envision what The Ramble would look, feel and taste like with an event patterned after the



*Design elements for the proposed nature-based playground.*





Click to view the housing rehabilitation and home ownership program details.

“Better Block” approach— activating a vision for a block or site without waiting for local planning efforts and approvals to occur.

In response to the community’s desire to add value to the economic development goals of The Ramble by attracting paddlers, cyclists, birders, and heritage tourists, the planning team secured a \$14,000 grant from DEDO Downtown Delaware to support development of a nature-based and heritage tourism plan for Laurel. Delaware Sea Grant also contributed \$5,000 towards implementation of the final plan.

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

Two studies funded with matching grants from DNREC were completed: 1) a Phase One environmental assessment of the entire proposed Ramble area; and 2) a feasibility report proposing specific low-impact green stormwater infrastructure installations throughout The Ramble.

Community leaders and DNREC are actively pursuing funding for The Ramble’s nature-based playground and proposed network of trails, including a link to Roger C. Fisher Park at The Ramble’s western end, as well as the stormwater installations. The playground’s design was completed in November 2016.

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

The Ramble plan includes a pocket neighborhood of 12-13 camp-style cottages. The town has met with several developers in an effort to spur construction of this neighborhood. Another use, such as a brewpub, could also be appropriate.

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

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

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

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

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

As one of its Downtown Development District incentives, Laurel proposed a comprehensive community improvement, housing rehabilitation and home ownership initiative for the district. The Laurel Redevelopment Corporation agreed to fund a position that would bring the program to life in a user-friendly format, coordinating the various programs and make it seamless to the applicant.

As an initial step, the LRC applied for and received a \$500,000 Strong Neighborhoods Housing Fund grant that would partner with the town, Sussex County Habitat for Humanity, Milford Housing Development Corporation, and NCALL. The town will donate a vacant lot and part of a town parking lot for the construction of four new homes in the Old Town section adjacent to The Ramble. In addition, Habitat would purchase and rehabilitate several homes and perform a major rehabilitation of two other owner-occupied homes within Old Town. Neighborhood community improvement events would be planned.

As mentioned, the LRC also has targeted several commercial properties in the area it plans to acquire, clean up and offer for repurposed uses. Two of them are brown-field sites.

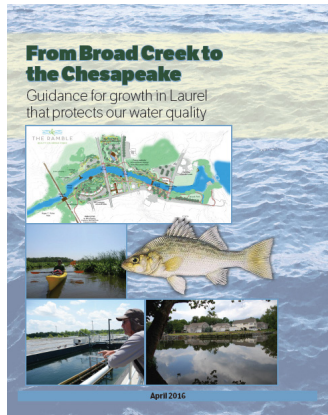


Broad Creek, with Abbotts on Broad Creek in the background and Canada geese in the foreground. Goose droppings have an adverse affect on water quality and human health.

For an interactive web map that features the Old Town Strong Neighborhoods Focus area, go to:

<http://arcg.is/2e3tvjL>





Click to view the Broad Creek sustainability report.

Beyond the Strong Neighborhoods Housing Fund, application the community improvement program funded by LRC will:

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

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

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

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

**Category 4: Protect Broad Creek from pollution, erosion and uses that devalue it**

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

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

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

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

The Ramble complements efforts to prevent nutrient pollution, such as nitrogen and phosphorous from entering Broad Creek. As a tributary of the Nanticoke River, which flows into the Chesapeake Bay, Broad Creek is subject to federal limits on nitrogen and phosphorous and is expected to meet these water quality goals by 2025. The town is expected to maintain a baseline allocation of these pollutants that was established in 2011, although the future of the Chesapeake Bay Program and requirements appears to be in flux.

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

In 2016, Cedar Creek Planning & Communications completed a detailed assessment of steps Laurel can take to meet the water quality standards and still grow. The report was prepared for the University of Delaware’s Sustainable Coastal Communities Initiative with DNREC/EPA funding.

Some of those steps include measures that can be taken within the Downtown Development District area. The report was released to the town in May 2016 and includes eight pages of recommendations—many of which will be included in the final comprehensive plan recommendations in this document.

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

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



The cottages are a signature element of The Ramble and should be built to a level of superior design.

The footprint of any commercial or residential development within The Ramble and the Marine Resources district should be built to minimize its impact within the riparian area. In fact, the requirements of the Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4) program (see report, far left), a federal regulatory program that DNREC intends to implement in the southern portion of Delaware’s Chesapeake watershed, likely will require low-impact development practices in the area.

### **Green infrastructure and environmental studies**

Besides the report detailing how Laurel can grow and meet water quality standards for Broad Creek, the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation also contracted with BrightFields Inc. to conduct a [Phase One Environmental Assessment](#) of the proposed Ramble area. The LRC also secured financial assistance from DNREC and hired ForeSight Associates to assess the feasibility of various [green stormwater infracture techniques](#) to manage polluted runoff from The Ramble when it is built out. ForeSight recommended specific techniques for various sections of The Ramble and prepared a cost estimate for each one.

In short, the town and LRC are preparing for environmentally sustainable development along the Broad Creek waterfront.



*The one-lane Poplar Street bridge is dangerous to navigate by foot or bicycle. The immediate area around it is targeted for redevelopment.*

## **COMMUNITY DESIGN BEYOND THE DDD PLAN**

Beyond the Downtown Development district plan, there are several key areas of community-design focus that will be discussed throughout the plan, with accompanying recommendations and implementation guidelines.

### **Poplar Street pedestrian bridge**

The one-lane Poplar Street bridge is a center-bearing, swing span bridge with a Warren pony truss superstructure, according to DelDOT. Constructed in 1915, the Poplar Street bridge is Delaware’s oldest movable highway bridge. It has been inoperable since 1975, although the turning mechanism remains in place. DelDOT is planning a reconditioning of the bridge beginning in the fall of 2018.

There are no sidewalks approaching the bridge, and it appears dangerous to cross the road or bridge on foot. With the Downtown Development District and Ramble project, much more foot traffic is expected in the area as homes and businesses are rehabilitated or rebuilt and the proposed waterfront cottages are built immediately west of the bridge. The nature-based playground is planned for the northeeast side of the bridge, and the new kayak launch is on the northwest side of the bridge.

The Ramble plan calls for trails along the waterfront, as well as a pedestrian bridge spanning Broad Creek in the vicinity of the . To promote safe foot and bicycle traffic in that neighborhood, a new pedestrian bridge and sidewalk approach would be desirable.

### **Library and Arts District**

Laurel’s library director has a vision for a small arts and information district in the block around the library. The ambitious vision would include a small theater, public art, galleries, studios and perhaps a culinary arts program. The alleyway between the library and a block of Market Street buildings, now a repository for garbage, would be transformed into an outdoor reading room and internet space.

This idea has captivated the Laurel Chamber of Commerce and many other community leaders. its promise is the transformation of a blighted commercial district into a thriving small-town arts center. Supporters will seek small grants for planning and feasibility studies.

### **U.S. 13 Corridor**

While it is difficult to think of a major highway corridor in terms of community design, town leaders feel strongly that more revenue-producing businesses on U.S. 13 are sorely needed. This plan draws a distinction between the types of development appro-



*Laurel’s patchwork municipal boundary along US 13.*



priate to the highway corridor and to Laurel’s downtown and guards against the areas competing with one another. Located between the larger cities Seaford and Salisbury, Md., large retailers, national fast-food restaurants and hotel chains have passed over Laurel.

To attract a hotel, additional supermarket, or other appropriate retail or chain store to the U.S. 13 corridor, Laurel should consider the following:

- Laurel’s municipal boundaries along 13 are a confusing patchwork; some large parcels fronting U.S. 13 are in town, and some are out of town.
- Water and wastewater upgrades have or will soon provide services to many of these parcels fronting U.S. 13.
- The town should provide incentives that will encourage key properties to be annexed in and connect to water and wastewater infrastructure, filling in the map and creating a less confusing municipal boundary.
- For the northernmost parcels that are in town but far from existing water and wastewater service, the town should consider what kind of development would be most appropriate and put the least strain on its capacity and services.
- The town needs to more clearly identify the entrances into town at Georgetown Road (U.S. 9) and Market Street (Del. 24) and prevail on property owners to clean up unsightly properties.



A new mixed-use zone could create town-like, walkable neighborhoods even if they are distant from the town’s business district. (From Randall Arendt’s “Rural by Design”)

# Housing choices

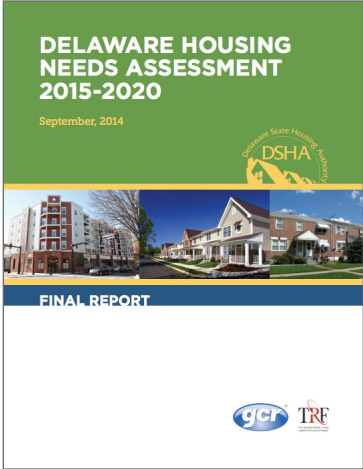
## AGING HOUSING STOCK, AFFORDABILITY STRUGGLES

Laurel is identified as a “highly distressed” housing market. It is “suffering from blight and concentrated poverty where strategies should be focused on stabilizing neighborhoods through increased homeownership, investment in existing homes and commercial areas, and people-based intervention strategies, to provide increased mobility, supportive services and community wealth.” That assessment comes from the Delaware Market Value Analysis included in the *Delaware Housing Needs Assessment 2015-2020*.

The tables on the next pages tell the story: One-third of Laurel’s housing stock dates to 1939 or earlier, compared to only 9.1% for the state of Delaware. About 44 percent of the housing units are rentals, and the median monthly rent in Laurel is relatively low—\$661 compared to \$965 for Sussex County. Many of the non-subsidized rentals are in chronic disrepair and prone to code violations, subject to fines that are viewed by some landlords as the cost of doing business. Many properties are owned by absentee landlords. The town’s code enforcement unit regularly inspects these rental properties and aggressively enforces town codes.

Almost 50 percent (49.1) of Laurel residents with a mortgage spend 30 percent or more of their monthly household income on housing related costs and are consid-

*Continued on page 36*



[Click to view the state Housing Needs Assessment.](#)



Rents in Laurel are relatively cheap. The median monthly rent is \$661. About 44 percent of Laurel’s housing units are rentals. The Rigby is a 15-unit apartment building on Central Avenue.. At any one time, several units of the Rugby are condemned.



Fig. 4.1



One third of Laurel's housing stock dates to 1939 or earlier.

Key Housing Comparisons - Delaware vs. Laurel				
Subject	Delaware		Laurel	
	Estimate	Percent	Estimate	Percent
HOUSING OCCUPANCY				
Total housing units	411,250	411,250	1,377	1,377
Occupied housing units	339,046	82.4%	1,222	88.7%
Vacant housing units	72,204	17.6%	155	11.3%
Homeowner vacancy rate	2.5	(X)	8.0	(X)
Rental vacancy rate	9.3	(X)	2.7	(X)
UNITS IN STRUCTURE				
Total housing units	411,250	411,250	1,377	1,377
1-unit, detached	240,246	58.4%	921	66.9%
1-unit, attached	60,677	14.8%	64	4.6%
2 units	6,433	1.6%	72	5.2%
3 or 4 units	9,982	2.4%	138	10.0%
5 to 9 units	15,761	3.8%	62	4.5%
10 to 19 units	23,500	5.7%	72	5.2%
20 or more units	17,348	4.2%	38	2.8%
Mobile home	37,202	9.0%	10	0.7%
Boat, RV, van, etc.	101	0.0%	0	0.0%
YEAR STRUCTURE BUILT				
Total housing units	411,250	411,250	1,377	1,377
Built 2010 or later	6,019	1.5%	43	3.1%
Built 2000 to 2009	81,093	19.7%	197	14.3%
Built 1990 to 1999	67,167	16.3%	96	7.0%
Built 1980 to 1989	61,682	15.0%	174	12.6%
Built 1970 to 1979	50,385	12.3%	89	6.5%
Built 1960 to 1969	46,353	11.3%	143	10.4%
Built 1950 to 1959	42,469	10.3%	104	7.6%
Built 1940 to 1949	18,786	4.6%	72	5.2%
Built 1939 or earlier	37,296	9.1%	459	33.3%
HOUSING TENURE				
Occupied housing units	339,046		1,222	
Owner-occupied	242,860	71.6%	686	56.1%
Renter-occupied	96,186	28.4%	536	43.9%
Average household size of owner-occupied units	2.66	(x)	2.99	(x)
Average household size of renter-occupied unit	2.56	(x)	3.30	(x)
Source: US Census American Community Survey, 2010-2014				

VALUE	Delaware		Laurel	
Owner-occupied units	242,860	242,860	686	686
Less than \$50,000	16,736	6.9%	58	8.5%
\$50,000 to \$99,999	11,308	4.7%	127	18.5%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	22,540	9.3%	264	38.5%
\$150,000 to \$199,999	42,512	17.5%	76	11.1%
\$200,000 to \$299,999	76,389	31.5%	101	14.7%
\$300,000 to \$499,999	57,153	23.5%	60	8.7%
\$500,000 to \$999,999	13,044	5.4%	0	0.0%
\$1,000,000 or more	3,178	1.3%	0	0.0%
Median (dollars)	\$232,900	(X)	\$131,300	(X)
GROSS RENT				
Occupied units paying rent	91,438	91,438	471	471
Less than \$200	1,438	1.6%	13	2.8%
\$200 to \$299	2,628	2.9%	25	5.3%
\$300 to \$499	4,809	5.3%	95	20.2%
\$500 to \$749	10,657	11.7%	108	22.9%
\$750 to \$999	25,155	27.5%	125	26.5%
\$1,000 to \$1,499	34,281	37.5%	95	20.2%
\$1,500 or more	12,470	13.6%	10	2.1%
Median (dollars)	1,012	(X)	661	(X)
No rent paid	4,748	(X)	65	(X)
SELECTED MONTHLY OWNER COSTS AS A PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME				
Housing units with a mortgage (excluding units where SMOCAPI cannot be computed)	167,759	167,759	493	493
Less than 20.0 percent	64,699	38.6%	107	21.7%
20.0 to 24.9 percent	27,306	16.3%	87	17.6%
25.0 to 29.9 percent	19,620	11.7%	57	11.6%
30.0 to 34.9 percent	13,964	8.3%	62	12.6%
35.0 percent or more	42,170	25.1%	180	36.5%
Not computed	971	(X)	0	(X)
GROSS RENT AS A PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME				
Occupied units paying rent (excluding units where GRAP1 cannot be computed)	89,379	89,379	471	471
Less than 15.0 percent	10,215	11.4%	44	9.3%
15.0 to 19.9 percent	11,443	12.8%	42	8.9%
20.0 to 24.9 percent	10,933	12.2%	39	8.3%
25.0 to 29.9 percent	11,077	12.4%	124	26.3%
30.0 to 34.9 percent	8,516	9.5%	35	7.4%
35.0 percent or more	37,195	41.6%	187	39.7%
Not computed	6,807	(X)	65	(X)

Homeowners and renters who spend 30 percent or more of their household income on housing, utilities and other housing-related expenses are considered cost-burdened.

In Laurel, almost 50 percent of homeowners with a mortgage exceed that threshold.





This home on 5th Street has been vacant for more than a decade.

Continued from page 33

ered cost-burdened; 47.1 percent of renters in Laurel spend more than 30 percent of their household income on rent.

A report prepared for Laurel’s Downtown Development District application indicated that only three new residences were constructed in Laurel between January 2013 and March 2016; one was built by Sussex County Habitat for Humanity, and two were rental units. A second Habitat house was dedicated in November 2016.

Currently, there is no “housing pipeline.”

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

The vacancy rate in Laurel is 11.3 percent. The town has many homes and commercial properties that have been vacant for years, some more than a decade. While some of these properties have been maintained, many have collapsing porches and roofs and pose a safety hazard.

Publicly subsidized housing

There are 427 units of publicly subsidized housing in Laurel - 31 percent of all housing units in Laurel. Laurel Commons on South Central Avenue was built for elderly residents, with 41 units; the rest of Laurel’s subsidized housing is occupied by families. Many of these units have been fully rehabbed between 2004 and 2013.

The town’s “invisible population” of younger, poorer, nonwhite residents are likely to live here and in the town’s aging, relatively inexpensive rental properties. To varying degrees, the complexes are targets for drugs supplied from Wilmington, Cambridge and Salisbury, according to Laurel Police Chief Dan Wright. He noted that fights with residents of “rival” developments are fairly common, egged on by social media posts.

The town’s leadership strongly believes that Laurel has more than its share of publicly subsidized housing, and Delaware State Housing Authority assessments agree. A 2014 [Market Valuation Analysis](#) classifies Laurel as Market Type G:

“Home sale prices in “G” markets are among the lowest in Delaware with median prices at \$105,805, although the variability in those price ranges (represented by sales pricevariance) is above average. Owner occupancy rates are the lowest in Delaware, while foreclosure sales and vacancy rates are among the highest-second only to “H” markets. “G” markets are distinguished by the highest rates

Fig. 4.2

Publicly subsidized housing in Laurel - 427 units total (31 percent of Laurel’s housing stock)						
Name	Address	Management	Units	Type	Built	Comments
Carvel Gardens	801 Daniel St.	Stephens Management Corporation	100	Family	1975	Units were fully rehabbed in 2012.
Carvel Gardens Annex	801 Daniel St.	Stephens Management Corporation	30	Family	1982	
Hollybrook Apartments II	501 Hollybrook Apartments	Severn Management Company	24	Family	1983	Units were fully rehabbed in 2009.
Hollybrook Farms (I, III, IV)	501 Hollybrook Apartments	Severn Management Company	100	Family	1978	Units were fully rehabbed in 2009.
Laurel Commons	100 Laurel Commons Lane	Habitat America	21	Elderly	2003	
Laurel Commons II	100 Laurel Commons Lane	Habitat America	20	Elderly	2005	
Little Creek Apartments	505 Little Creek Drive	Severn Management Company	72	Family	1981	Units were fully rehabbed in 2004.
Wexford Village	56 Sunset Drive	East Coast Property Management Inc.	48	Family	1992	Units were fully rehabbed in 2013.
Wexford Village II	56 Sunset Drive	East Coast Property Management Inc.	12	Family	1992	Units were fully rehabbed in 2013.

Source: Delaware State Housing Authority

of HUD-based assisted rental housing, with a percentage nearly six times the state average. Rates of new construction and development applications and of residences built since 2009 are well below state averages.”

Recession made large projects evaporate

Laurel was expecting aggressive growth in the mid-2000s. The town annexed a campground along Broad Creek for what was planned to be a 247-townhome development and also annexed almost 500 acres on the northernmost edge of town for a planned mixed-use community of 1,400 homes and 1.3 million square feet of commercial space. Two large parcels on Discountland Road was slated for 369 residential units (Village Brooke East) and 284 units (Village Brooke West). These projects fell through during the recession.



Hollybrook Apartments



The Laurel Redevelopment Corporation purchased and cleared a formal industrial site on Broad Creek, making way for the construction of large, high-end townhomes, the gated Villas on Broad Creek. The villas initially sold for about \$400,000, but since the recession values have fallen and one unit recently sold for \$205,500. It had been on the market for more than three years. Several units are being rented.

**A focus on rehabilitation and home ownership**

Laurel’s Downtown Development District application brought attention to the need to focus on housing rehabilitation and home ownership—especially in the town’s historic core. As part of Laurel’s DDD application, the town and Laurel Redevelopment Corporation proposed a comprehensive housing rehabilitation and home ownership program as an incentive.

The Laurel Redevelopment Corporation agreed to fund a position that would bring the program to life in a user-friendly format, coordinating the various programs and make it seamless to the applicant.

As an initial step, the LRC has applied for a Strong Neighborhoods Housing Fund grant that would partner with the town, Sussex County Habitat for Humanity, Milford Housing Development Corporation, and NCALL. Habitat serves families who earn up to 60 percent of Sussex County’s median household income, and Milford Housing serves families who earn up to 120 percent.

The town will donate a vacant lot and part of a town parking lot for the construction of four new homes in the Old Town section adjacent to The Ramble. In addition, Habitat would purchase and rehabilitate several homes and perform a major rehabilitation of two other owner-occupied homes within Old Town. Neighborhood community improvement events would be planned.



*Artist’s rendering of the cottages planned for the Broad Creek waterfront as part of The Ramble redevelopment project.*

In addition, the town is seeking Neighborhood Building Blocks funding to implement several ordinances and policies recommended in this comprehensive plan. Many are aimed at community improvements such as design guidelines and cracking down on long-term vacant properties and chronically negligent landlords.

The proposed waterfront cottages conceived in The Ramble redevelopment plan would be market-rate homes, but they would be priced well within Sussex County’s affordable range. Also, the Villas on Broad Creek includes an undeveloped portion that was added to the Downtown Development District in October 2016. The foot-print already has been approved for eight duplex townhomes.

The Downtown Development District provides significant incentives for commercial and residential property owners to improve what they own.

**Laurel is an affordable town**

By its demographics, real estate market and location, Laurel is and will remain an affordable town. A strategy that seeks to improve the existing historic core through promoting housing rehabilitation and home ownership will attract new development and new residents. Those new residents could easily be active pre-retirement and retirement empty nesters who seek small-town living and outdoor activities. It could also include couples or small families who work out of their home and serve the Delaware, Eastern Shore or Mid-Atlantic region. These trends are already beginning to show up in Laurel.

Seeking this demographic would help balance Laurel’s population, which currently skews very young—median age 27.7 More small, age-restricted developments, such as Laurel Commons would provide that balance. Large-scale age-restricted developments, especially if they are stand-alone enclaves with little physical connection to the town, can alter the character and power structure of a town.

The town plans to develop a “mixed-use” zoning category when it updates its code. Any new large developments should be mixed-use and well designed to mitigate the challenges that residential-only developments can pose to town services, infrastructure, traffic and schools. They should have a “town-like” feel and be physically connected to the town. They should include market-rate rental units for younger professionals such as those who work for Laurel’s largest employer, the school district.



*Laurel Commons is a cottage-style retirement village on South Central Avenue.*





# Historic and Cultural Resources

## 5

### IT ALL BEGAN AT “THE WADING PLACE”

*(This history was condensed from Laurel’s 2011 Comprehensive Plan.)*

Laurel lies at a strategic drop in Broad Creek as the creek runs its course and falls to join the Nanticoke River at Phillips Landing. The town is an integral part of the Nanticoke River Watershed, which in turn is part of the Chesapeake Bay. No place is more central to Laurel’s founding than “the Wading Place” of the late 17th and early 18th centuries; it lay between today’s Central and Delaware Avenues.

The Wading Place was in existence before 1680 and followed a Nanticoke Indian Trail along and across Broad Creek.

By the 17th century, the Laurel site had long been occupied by the Nanticoke Indians who lived throughout the Nanticoke River watershed. Until the 1764 survey of the Mason-Dixon Line, the area was treated as part of Old Somerset County, Maryland. Its first European settlers migrated north from Old Somerset, having first come north from Northampton County on the Virginia Eastern Shore.

The Broad Creek and Little Creek Hundreds, early administrative units north and south of the creek, were formed at this time. In 1683, James Wyeth and Marmaduke Master patented “Batchelor’s Delight,” a 250-acre tract south of the “Wading Place.” In 1711, 3,000 acres south of the creek were reserved as a Nanticoke Indian Reservation authorized by an Act of the Maryland Legislature.

### Laurel’s influence exceeded its size

A village known as Laurel, named for the flowering laurel growing naturally on the creek banks, was in existence as early as 1799. Laurel quickly developed into an important shipping and manufacturing town in Southwest Delaware. The home of a number of Delaware’s governors, the town exerted an influence over Delaware far greater than its size would suggest. Originally oriented to the Chesapeake Bay market, when the railroad came through in the mid-nineteenth century, the market orientation shifted to Philadelphia and to the manufacture of lumber products and the shipping and canning of fruits and vegetables. The growth and prosperity in Laurel is reflected in its architecture.

By 1810, the population of Little Creek Hundred was about 2,300 and that of the village of Laurel about 350. Delaware law required public schools after 1821. Warehouses were built along the creek. In 1830, state lottery funds were used to dredge

Broad Creek and better connect Laurel with the Nanticoke. Businesses grew from 4 in 1832 to 41 in 1850.

### Shipbuilding an early industry

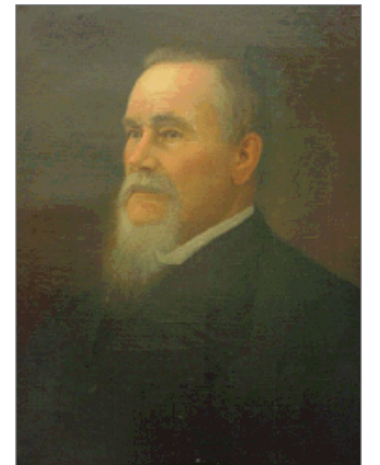
By 1850, shipbuilders were building three-masted Chesapeake Bay schooner rams on the banks of Broad Creek. These cargo ships plied the Atlantic Coast and Inland Waters from Halifax to Havana. Victorian mansions were built as wealth increased, and neighborhoods began to take their present form. Local inventions arising from the business of agricultural and lumber processing and distribution became numerous.

West Laurel as a neighborhood began to form before the Civil War and grew rapidly thereafter. The railroad reached Laurel from the north in 1859, connecting the village with Wilmington, Philadelphia and northern cities. By 1860 the town population was 1,200. Marvil Packaging, basket manufacturers, became the biggest business in Laurel.

During the first half of the 19th century, Laurel was important politically. Four Laurel men were elected governors of Delaware between 1805 and 1855. The first, Nathaniel Mitchell, was an original settler of Laurel. Trained as a lawyer, he also had interests in a number of mills. He was elected as a Federalist in 1805 and served until 1808.

The second was John Collins, a miller who was elected as a Democrat-Republican in 1821 and served one term. William Barkley Cooper, a grandson of Laurel founder Barkley Townsend, won the 1841 election as a Whig and served until 1845. The fourth Laurel governor was William Ross. He was elected in 1851, several years after moving north to Seaford.

**Six Delaware Governors have called Laurel home - including four between 1805 and 1855.**



*Joshua Marvil, entrepreneur, served as Delaware’s Governor for three months in 1895.*



*Nanticoke tribal leader Herman Jackson blesses an event in Laurel near the site of the original “wading place.”*



*Laurel’s waterfront has always played a significant role in its history. Shipbuilding, canning, and basket-making were among the industries that dominated the waterfront over the centuries.*

**Photo from Delaware Archives**



On the eve of the Civil War, the population of Laurel was 1,200 white persons, approximately 500 free blacks and about 200 slaves. The Civil War, which began in April 1861, divided Laurel. There were two militia companies: one fought for the North and the other for the South. Many Laurel residents supplied the South with goods and others supplied the North.

**Marvil left his mark on Laurel**

Concurrent with a gradual change from growing mostly corn in the area to fruits and berries was the arrival in town of an entrepreneur who amassed a fortune with his fruit basket and container business. Joshua H. Marvil, a former shipwright, manufacturer of agricultural equipment, carpenter, and cabinetmaker, was one of the most important and colorful of 19th century Laurel residents. Besides being an entrepreneur, he was also an inventor who received 17 patents in 18 years. Most were for fruit baskets and containers.

Around 1870, he built a basket factory on the west side of West Market Street and used the Gothic Revival house across the street as his office. During his first year of operation he manufactured 600,000 baskets. Thereafter he expanded his business to include wharves and warehouses along the river and warehouses along the railroad. By the 1880s, he was producing 2 million baskets and crates annually; one of his workers could make a basket in two minutes. He also developed a network of agents, sub-agents, and contractors. He later expanded his business to Sharptown, Maryland.

In 1894, he was elected Governor of Delaware but died shortly after being sworn in. He was the fifth Delaware Governor to come from Laurel. He and his family were responsible for many of the Queen Anne and Colonial Revival houses which remain in the town, including two houses on the west side of West Street.

*Joshua Marvil's sprawling basket and crate factory on Broad Creek in the late 1800s.*

**Photo from Delaware Archives**



In 1883, Laurel received a charter and organized a town government. The new town government contracted with George Parsons to build an iron bridge over Broad Creek and began to pave streets.

In the 1980s, Daniel J. Fooks built a cannery at the foot of Central Avenue. He was a wealthy local landowner, ship owner, large fruit grower, and the first President of the Sussex Trust, Title and Safe Deposit Company. Fooks brought in George W. Stradley, a canner from Bridgeville, to run the cannery. The Fooks family, including his son Harry K., remained in the canning business until the 1920s. It was Harry K. Fooks who built the large Colonial Revival house on West Street—one of the most impressive houses in town.

Many cannery workers lived along 10th Street in the many simple gable-front Queen Anne houses or along 5th Street.

By 1898, the Laurel Shirt Factory was located on the north side of Market Street near 4th Street. It was employing a full force and plans were being made to enlarge it. Later it was reported that it was running night and day. In a similar manner, the local basket factories were working 11 hours daily to keep up with the large number of orders.

In June 1899, a fire destroyed several blocks of the business district. The result of the fire was increased building, but with a new emphasis. Almost all of the commercial buildings constructed after the fire were made of brick. Thus along Market Street today there are many good examples of Italianate and Colonial Spanish Revival brick commercial buildings. There was also a concerted effort made to finish the town's water system and to create a permanent fire company.

By 1900, Laurel had grown to a city of about 4,000, a population which remained stable until after World War II when the population was 3,000. In 1900 a Delaware newspaper characterized the town as a “thriving manufacturing city.”

**Schooner vs. train, 1904**

In June 1904, a unique tragedy occurred when the Delaware Railroad's Norfolk Express chugged over an open drawbridge and plunged into Broad Creek just as the schooner Golden Gate was passing through. The engineer of the train lost his life in the accident, but no one else was injured. The baggage master turned out to be the hero of the day when he crawled under the moving train to uncouple the cars with the passengers aboard. The schooner was a total loss, but the engine was recovered and repaired.



*Market Street and Central Avenue*

**Photo from Delaware Archives**



*The Norfolk Express crashed into the Golden Gate schooner passing under an open railroad bridge in a spectacular fatal accident in 1904.*



During the early 20th century, Laurel continued to be an economic distribution center for southwestern Sussex County as well as a manufacturing center with canneries, basket and crate factories, planing mills, shirt factories and other businesses.

In 1921 the du Pont family made a major contribution to Laurel's public schools, and the Laurel Public Library was founded with their assistance. DuPont came to Seaford in 1939, creating many good jobs filled by Laurel residents. The DuPont Company apparently had wished to come to Laurel, but interest was low. With the massive construction for the new DuPont Nylon factory in Seaford, many workers sought rental housing in nearby Laurel. This marks the beginning of significant rental housing in Laurel. US Route 13, the dual highway, which was also called the "Ocean Highway to Florida," opened for travel in 1925.

In 1988, the Laurel Historic District was established as Delaware's largest. In response to businesses departures from the Town Center, the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation began a redevelopment program for the revitalization of the Town Center and Broad Creek area.

## LAUREL'S HISTORIC DISTRICT

Today, the town is struggling to reclaim its heritage and prosperity, recognizing the challenges but embracing the opportunities that exist to reimagine the town and attract new jobs, residents and visitors.

Laurel's Historic District was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1988 and claims to be the largest in the state with 709 contributing buildings, sites and structures, as well as 99 noncontributing buildings and sites. The district includes residential, commercial, industrial, and institutional buildings dating from the late 18th century to the 1930s.

Many of those properties no longer exist or are in poor condition. The town did not adopt a local historic preservation district ordinance or establish a historic preservation commission, so there is no protection or preservation strategy for Laurel's historic homes, commercial buildings or other sites.

Historic themes represented in Laurel's Historic District include manufacturing; architecture, engineering and decorative arts; transportation and communication; and religion. These themes are included in Delaware's 1989 Historic Comprehensive Plan for Preservation, which reflects Laurel's Historic District application at the time it was submitted.

Themes evolve, and new themes are studied and added to the National Park Service's thematic framework. History enthusiasts see the potential to recognize new themes in Laurel. Because properties as recent as 50 years old are eligible for inclusion in a National Historic District, some preservationists have started to discuss whether Laurel's district should be amended and expanded, and what new themes should be included. Laurel's west side, including Dunbar Elementary and historic African-American churches, has been discussed for possible inclusion in the town's historic district.

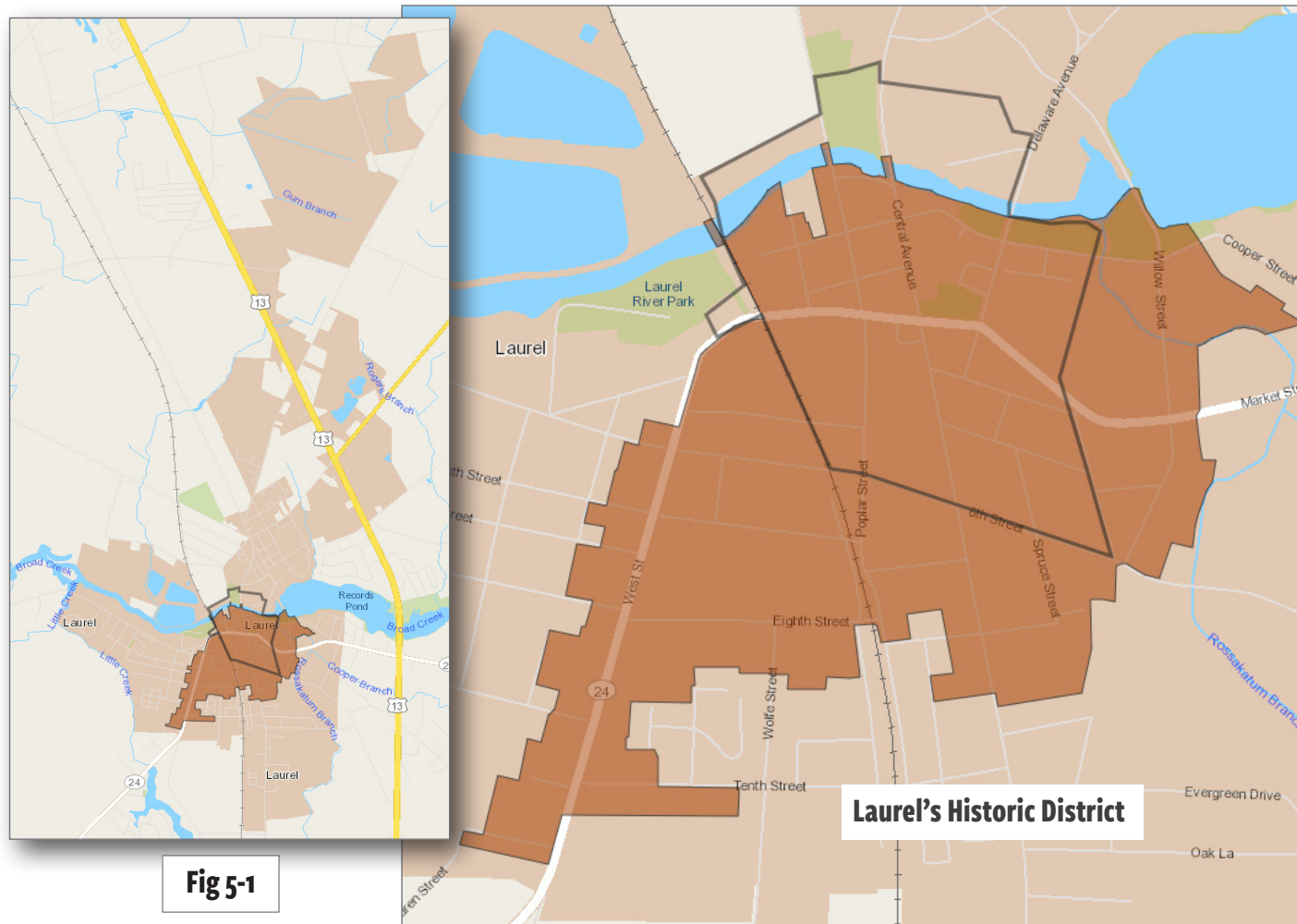
Before enlarging the district is seriously considered, the town needs to determine what it fundamentally means to be in Laurel's Historic District, and whether signature historic homes and properties should be more actively protected along with Laurel's overall character as a historic community. Having Delaware's largest historic district doesn't mean much if these properties can sit vacant, deteriorate, become unsightly and unsafe, and then be demolished.

### Downtown Development District presents opportunity for preservation

Except for the parcels immediately north of Broad Creek within The Ramble plan, Laurel's Downtown Development District lies entirely within Laurel's Historic District. Because of the incentives offered within the DDD and the priority consideration for state historic tax credits, residents and businesses have an unprecedented opportunity to rehabilitate historic properties, both residential and commercial.

**Having Delaware's largest historic district doesn't mean much if these properties can sit vacant, deteriorate, become unsightly and unsafe, and then be demolished.**





**Fig 5-1**

At the same time, the town should adopt a more proactive and engaged strategy toward long-term vacant and deteriorating properties within the historic district, amplifying attention and enforcement remedies.

This combined “carrot and stick” approach, within a specific targeted area, should result in more preservation and successful rehabilitations that maintain the historic character of the property. In the Community Design, Section 3, the plan recommends a focus on the main routes through town of Central Avenue and Market Street (Historic Core Corridor) within the Downtown Development District, as well as the rezoning of residential properties within the DDD to Town-Center. This focus and zoning change would provide flexibility to property owners and enable the town to pay special attention to properties that are vacant and deteriorating and where residents and business owners are proposing rehabilitation. This Market Street-Central Avenue corridor also would be a focus area for commercial vitality and improved walkability, as well as personal safety.

Market Street and Central Avenue are the most visible aspect of Laurel’s character and history. Laurel does not have the capacity to focus on the entire town when it comes to enforcement, preservation of historic buildings, and promoting more viable local

businesses that are attractive to passersby. This corridor within the DDD is a place to start, as it represents the heart of downtown Laurel.

### Creation of Historic Advisory Board

The Laurel Historical Society is an active and committed organization of residents and preservationists who care deeply about the history of their town. The group does not expect Laurel to establish a historic commission with strict jurisdiction over rehabilitation and demolition of historic properties. However, they discussed and supported the concept of a Historic Advisory Board that could provide comments and guidance to the town if a historic property owner proposed a significant rehabilitation or demolition.

In addition, some preservation code with minimum standards should be adopted by the town. For example, within the Downtown Development District, the town could require a major rehabilitation project to secure the services of an architect. This would prevent a haphazard project that altered the historic character of a home in this highly visible corridor.

Such minimum standards could also permit inspection of and require the documentation by the Historic Advisory Board or Historical Society of a property scheduled for demolition.

Laurel already has lost many of its historic buildings. At some juncture, the tipping point could be reached when Laurel loses its essential character. An aerial view of the downtown reveals many empty spaces and parking lots where there was once a bustling commercial center.

### Historic and cultural assets as a tourism strategy

A key reason to enhance the preservation of Laurel’s historic and cultural assets is the potential to attract visitors interested in Laurel’s history, historic homes and cultural sites in the area. These cultural assets, along with natural assets that attract birders, paddlers, bikers and other outdoor enthusiasts, were documented in a 2016 report to Laurel Town Council by Conservation Community Consultants.

The 2016 report, funded by the Delaware Economic Development Office, examined the significant potential for nature and heritage tourism in Laurel and within a 5- to 10-mile radius of the town. It clearly conveys a plan for proceeding to establish Laurel’s position as a gateway to tourism in the Nanticoke region. Nature and heritage tourists tend to have more disposable income, stay longer, seek authentic experiences, and leave less of a footprint when they visit.

The report will be discussed more thoroughly in the Economic Development section.



*This vacant historic property at 504 S. Central Avenue is within Laurel’s Downtown Development District and the proposed Historic Core Corridor. It is eligible for an array of incentives.*



Fig 6-1

Top employers in Laurel

	Employer	No.
1	Laurel school district	271
2	Food Lion	65
3	Town of Laurel	32
4	D&C Auto Sales	32
5	Schwan's Home Service	30
6	US Postal Service	26
7	Insurance Market	24
8	Health and Social Services - Poplar St.	22
9	M&T Bank	22

**Source:** Delaware Economic Development Office. This table lists only the top 9, as there are many businesses cited with 20 employees.

TOWARD A FOCUSED, REALISTIC JOBS STRATEGY

Laurel is challenged by an employment base that is government- and retail-driven, with small businesses that largely do not export products regionally and that do not draw customers from outside the Laurel area.

The obvious exception is Johnny Janosik Furniture, with about 200 employees and a regional customer base, but it is not within the town limits of Laurel.

Lacking a local source of employment data, the Delaware Economic Development Office provided a list of employers mostly driven by Hoovers company information and its own internal sources. The table at left is the best determination available, but is still probably not accurate beyond the top three. Only the top nine employers were listed because several businesses were tied at 10th with 20 employees.

However the top 10 or 20 employers shake out, four of the top nine are government agencies that pay no local property taxes—although they probably provide the most stable salaries and benefits in Laurel.

According to the US Census there were 956 primary jobs within Laurel’s town limits in 2014. (A primary job is the highest paying job for an individual worker for the year.) Every day, as mentioned in Chapter Two and shown in Fig. 6-2 at right, 1,668 Laurel residents leave the town limits to work somewhere else, and 878 workers come into Laurel every day to work. So only 78 persons actually both live and work within Laurel’s town limits.

A five-part strategy

In spite of the lack of entrepreneurial businesses with the capacity to innovate and grow, Laurel has a recent history of trying to reinvent itself. Recent successes and pending efforts point to a balanced and realistic redevelopment strategy for Laurel:

1. Encourage existing businesses and potential newcomers to access the Downtown Development District tools and incentives to rehabilitate, expand and improve their properties, including within The Ramble footprint;
2. Ensure that the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation’s strategic redevelopment goals are communicated to and supported by town government;
3. Implement the nature/heritage tourism strategy accepted by Town Council in 2016 and develop this unique niche that differentiates the town within the region;

4. Provide incentives to encourage annexation of key parcels along US 13 to fill in gaps and increase the number of highway parcels with water and wastewater access, while developing and implementing a commercial development strategy that could include a campus-style business/light manufacturing park; and
5. Incorporate Laurel’s new brand more thoroughly across organizations, marketing efforts, community events and other opportunities.

The town itself currently lacks the capacity to design and manage the town’s economic development strategy, and one of the plan recommendations is to identify a path toward funding a professional economic development specialist with planning knowledge who would coordinate with the town, the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation, the Laurel Chamber of Commerce and other partners.

Even in the absence of such a professional, the town needs an economic development plan that seamlessly interweaves these five elements. An engaged steering team with a shared vision, goals and objectives could drive this strategy. The town, along with such a team if it is created, need to draw a clear distinction between appropriate development and businesses along US 13 and within the town’s core business district, including the waterfront.

Each of the five parts merits further discussion.

1. Fully activate Downtown Development District

In August 2016, 72 acres that includes the waterfront and Ramble area, business district, the Old Town neighborhood, Town Hall and several blocks of homes became Laurel’s Downtown Development District. The residential component of the DDD includes large historic properties along Central Avenue and smaller owner-occupied and rental houses. Ten commercial and residential properties are vacant. [See story map.](#)

The DDD offers many incentives to both business owners, owners of commercial properties, homeowners and landlords. The incentives include:

- A graduated waiver of the town’s sewer and water impact fees, which total \$7,000 per equivalent dwelling unit (EDU). The reduction ranges from 40 percent to 60 percent depending on the number of EDUs.
- A five-year abatement of town property taxes on improvements. The town has prepared necessary legislation for a charter change to be able to provide this incentive.
- A discount of at least 25 percent off the appraised value of land owned by the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation. The LRC owns several properties along the waterfront and intends to buy more.

Fig 6-2

Inflow/outflow job counts

	Count	Share
Employed in Laurel town limits	956	100%
Employed in Laurel but living outside	878	91.8%
Employed and living in Laurel	78	8.2%
Workforce living in Laurel	1,746	100%
Living in Laurel but employed outside	1,668	95.5%
Living and employed in Laurel	78	4.5%

**Source:** Center for Economic Studies, U.S. Census Bureau



- A community improvement program focused on rehabilitation and increasing home ownership. In October, the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation, the town, Milford Housing Development Corporation and Sussex County Habitat for Humanity prepared a \$550,000 Strong Neighborhoods Fund application to purchase and rehabilitate and construct 10 owner-occupied homes.
- The state DDD grant, which reimburses up to 20 percent of the hard costs of rehabilitation and construction;
- The state historic tax credit, which earmarks the first 30 percent of its annual allotment for Downtown Development Districts;
- Sussex County will provide a 50 percent match, up to \$10,000, to any state grant for eligible, approved projects in the designated Sussex districts.
- The town offered to donate a vacant lot at the corner of Oak and Market streets for an appropriate project. The lot will be used to build a new own-

er-occupied home under the three-year Strong Neighborhoods Fund project. The town also donated part of a parking lot it owns within the DDD for construction of three new homes by the Milford Housing Development Corporation.

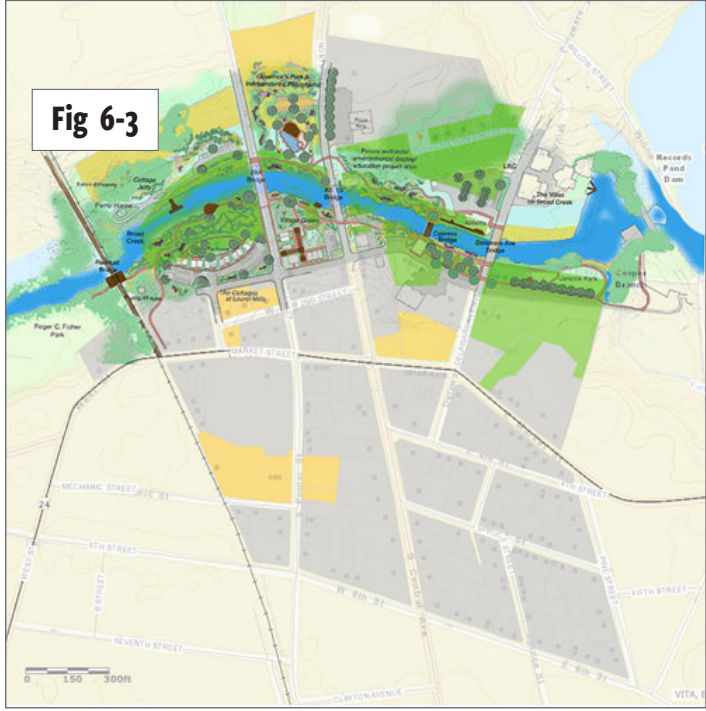
The University of Delaware’s Small Business Development Center is planning to provide business counseling for the benefit of small and emerging businesses in rural areas, particularly within Downtown Development Districts. The SBDC plans to hold two half-day sessions in Laurel to assist small businesses with business formation, business plans and all facets of start-up; purchase and/or expansion.

The Laurel Redevelopment Corporation has contracted with Cedar Creek Planning & Communications to develop and execute the community improvement program; the first step was the Strong Neighborhoods Fund application. In 2017, more focused communication and outreach efforts

will encourage participation in DDD incentives by residents, business owners and property owners.

## 2. Coordinate with Laurel Redevelopment Corporation

The nonprofit Laurel Redevelopment Corporation is a unique entity among small towns in Delaware. From a group of local citizens attempting to halt the deterioration of Downtown Laurel’s commercial district in 1992, the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation (LRC) has evolved into an active and effective grass-roots community group of donors, workers, and leaders, all striving to work cooperatively with government



Laurel’s DDD boundary with The Ramble plan overlaid on it.



The Villas at Broad Creek, luxury townhomes, were built on an old industrial site purchased and cleaned up by the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation.

leaders, local groups, and private investors to make Laurel a better place in which to invest, live, work, and visit.

The LRC’s key accomplishments are:

- The purchase and accumulation of 30-plus parcels in the key Downtown and Creekside areas of Laurel, most having derelict commercial or residential buildings;
- The clearing and cleanup of acquired properties, including the rehabilitation of older buildings when financially feasible;
- The use of grants and LRC funds to stabilize the banks along LRC Broad Creek properties;
- The use of grants and LRC funds to establish permanent public parks, with the purpose of protecting and beautifying the creekside parks in perpetuity (developed parks have sometimes been gifted to the town or other nonprofit organizations); and
- The use of LRC funds and grants for economic development, including the construction of new commercial properties and the support of its Entrepreneurial Incubation Program.

Past LRC practice has been very conservative, and the organization historically has taken on no debt. Recently, the LRC was the lead applicant on the Strong Neighborhoods Fund application; the organization will receive a \$1 million line of credit from NCALL for redevelopment efforts within the Old Town section of the DDD.

The LRC has identified additional strategic properties within the DDD that, if cleaned up and rebuilt, would help advance redevelopment efforts, such as The Ramble..

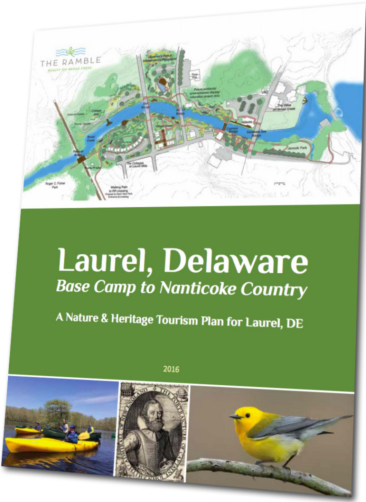


The LRC entered into the community development realm with the Strong Neighborhoods Fund application and commitment to implementing the Community Improvement program outlined in the Downtown Development District plan.

It is important that the LRC’s strategy is communicated to and understood by the town government and its leaders, and that the two entities operate in sync. Essentially, the LRC functions as the town’s economic development arm although its focus is the waterfront and business district and not the entire town.

3. Implement Laurel’s Nature/Heritage Tourism Report

There are struggling small towns like Laurel throughout Delaware and the country. Older residents remember the days when they shopped downtown and watched a Saturday matinee. Most are trying to figure out how to reinvent themselves and, if they have highway frontage, hope to attract a fast-food restaurant or “Big Box” store.



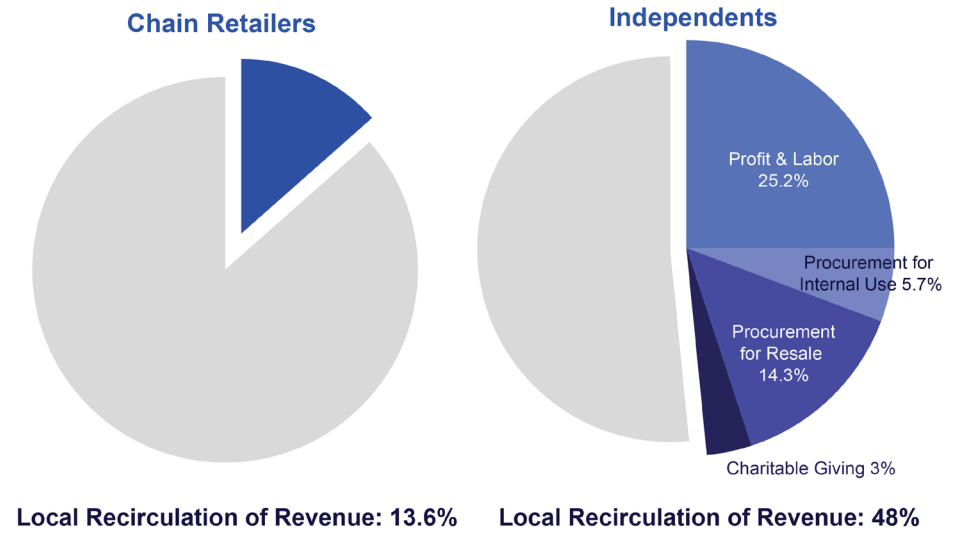
Click on the Nature and Heritage Tourism Plan to view it.

Laurel, however, has a significant opportunity to differentiate itself because of its physical setting on Broad Creek and its location within the Nanticoke watershed. The town was presented in 2016 with a “Base Camp to Nanticoke Country: A Nature and Tourism Plan for Laurel, Delaware.” Spearheaded by the LRC and the University of Delaware’s Sustainable Coastal Communities Initiative, Conservation Community Consulting undertook a detailed assessment of nature- and heritage-related assets in and around Laurel. They were assisted by a group of local stakeholders and regional tourism professionals.

Besides the in-depth description of assets, the report presents the opportunity for Laurel to position itself as a Trail Town for exploring Nanticoke Country. Among the many recommendations, the report states:

- Laurel must protect its natural and historic assets, including at least minimal protection for the town’s historic district;
- Protect Broad Creek, which is arguably the town’s strongest lure and most important economic asset;
- Update building and zoning codes and seek state and federal assistance to reflect the town’s vision of how it should look and be more enticing to potential visitors;
- Revitalize Market Street as a Phase 2 initiative after The Ramble is underway;
- Beyond town limits, Laurel’s leadership should advocate for added acreage and protections around the natural assets that make the region unique and worth visiting;

Local Economic Return of Indies v. Chains



\*Compiled results from nine studies by Civic Economics, 2012: [www.civiceconomics.com](http://www.civiceconomics.com)  
Graph by American Independent Business Alliance: AMIBA.net

- Tell the region’s nature and heritage story when promoting activities, and tell stories unique to the Laurel region;
- Capitalize on the 2016 branding exercise which resulted in “Laurel: Great Things Come Naturally;”
- Lure businesses that support the traveler experience, such as an kayak outfitter, bicycle shop, a bed and breakfast, a farm-to-table restaurant, a craft brewery, or an ice cream shop;
- Utilize existing popular destinations to market the town, such as Abbots on Broad Creek and the Laurel Coffee Shop;
- Promote Laurel’s nature and heritage resources to the beach hotels in Sussex County’s coastal resorts;
- Develop more placemaking activities that activate the waterfront and/or celebrate Laurel’s history, culture and natural assets;
- Become a Paddlers’ Trail Town, creating water trails that connect Laurel to surrounding tourism assets; and
- Develop large and inviting signage using the brand to advertise Laurel’s natural and historic attractions.

Highway development does not define a town, although this plan makes recommendations for improving opportunities along US 13. Fast-food restaurants and chains along a highway corridor could be Anywhere USA, and they are not as beneficial to the local economy. As the infographic above shows, independent local

Fig 6-4

For more information on the multiplier effects of chains vs. independent businesses, see

<https://www.amiba.net/resources/multiplier-effect/>



Broad Creek and ponds surrounding Laurel are accessible to a range of paddling abilities.



businesses recirculate a much higher percentage of their revenues back into the community.

Berlin, Md., is a nearby example of a town that has reinvented itself into a destination and “America’s Coolest Small Town.” And Berlin doesn’t have a river running through it.

The 2011 plan called for implementing a small boat harbor on the site of a treatment lagoon at the town’s wastewater treatment plan on the north side of Broad Creek. It is within the floodplain. It would be a focal point in Laurel’s open space network, with potential linkages between the harbor, Old Town, West Laurel and the proposed Ramble. The Town would like to keep this proposal under consideration.

Implementing this plan also means safeguarding the town’s historic district, protecting Broad Creek and the tree canopy around it, ensuring that the town’s zoning code does not permit uses that would undermine a nature and heritage tourism strategy, and reducing blight in the downtown area. All of these goals are discussed elsewhere in this plan.

4. Encourage annexation along US 13 and facilitate commercial development

With funding from US Department of Agriculture Rural Development, Laurel is completing a \$12 million upgrade to its water and wastewater systems. Large parcels along US 13 and elsewhere within town limits will have access to water and wastewater (see map on page 87).

Delaware’s municipal boundaries along US 13 are a patchwork that could invite confusion about jurisdiction and provision of town services, tax rates, and where infrastructure is and isn’t available.

The town should identify annexation targets along US 13 and consider developing appropriate incentives that would encourage their owners to become part of the town. Incentives could include reduction in sewer and water impact or connection fees or actual rates; in the case of vacant properties that could be developed, an incentive could be waiver of property taxes until a development proposal is approved.

The town should also identify frontage property that could be made shovel-ready with infrastructure in place for sought-after commercial development such as a hotel or chain retail store. The town potentially could attract a retailer with marketing information about the Salisbury, Md.-Delaware urbanized area and the lack of sales tax in Delaware.

Because of several recent false alarms (businesses that did not materialize) along the US 13 corridor, the town should approach DEDO or USDA Rural Development for as-

sistance with a retail market assessment that would examine both the downtown and US 13 and determine a differentiating and complementary attraction strategy for the two commercial areas. Such professional assistance could help Laurel determine what is realistic to seek in the highway corridor.

Unless incomes rise and the town’s demographics start to change, it will be difficult to attract national chains with Seaford 5 miles to the north and Salisbury, Md., 11 miles to the south. By focusing on the unique nature and heritage tourism strategy, a highway commercial plan, The Ramble and the Downtown Development District, success will spread throughout the town—including along US 13.

Concurrent with the completion of this comprehensive plan, the University of Delaware’s Institute for Public Administration (IPA) is completing work on a strategic marketing plan focused on a) assessing the potential fit and competitiveness of a Laurel business park within the region and b) analyzing and recommending potential sites for a business or industrial park within Laurel. (The final report had not been presented to the town as of August 2017.)

The first component entails an analysis of the regional market and planning context for potential park-based commercial or industrial development in Laurel, including recommendations on industrial or commercial sectors to target for recruitment efforts; design and infrastructure characteristics that could make a park particularly attractive for developers, entrepreneurs, or business owners; and planning and organizational factors that should be considered by the town and its partners in further assessing the feasibility of a park.

The second component involves examining parcel-based characteristics for several areas advanced by the town as candidates for commercial- or industrial-focused business parks. While findings from the first component of this study will certainly inform implementation efforts, this part of the study most directly relates to the comprehensive plan’s future land use element and is thus summarized here.

The IPA examined several parcels and their attributes and assessed which would be most compatible for an industrial or commercial park. See map and table on next page, Figures 6-6 and 6-7.

Sample wages by industry, Sussex County Fig 6-5

Industry	Annual average weekly wage	Annual wages per employee
General freight trucking, local (2014)	\$1,072	\$55,730
Education and health services	\$996	\$51,768
Merchant wholesalers, durable goods	\$959	\$49,886
Construction	\$829	\$43,122
Manufacturing	\$793	\$41,231
Goods producing	\$802	\$41,679
Professional and business services	\$785	\$40,827
Service providing	\$680	\$35,359
Natural resources and mining	\$676	\$35,153
Trade, transportation and utilities	\$625	\$32,502
Retail trade	\$511	\$26,581
Miscellaneous store retailers	\$444	\$23,105
Leisure and hospitality	\$374	\$19,444
Restaurants	\$356	\$18,490

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015

Continued on page 59



Areas for Analysis as Potential Business/Industrial Parks 12/2016



Source: University of Delaware Institute for Public Administration

Analysis of potential industrial/business park sites in Laurel **Fig 6-7**

(continued on next page)

Area	Acres	Zoning	Existing Use	Sewer cost	Accessibility	Visibility	Area Compatibility	Envrionmental Considerations	Summary Assessment
1	534	R-1	Open	Expensive	Easy	Low	Low	Majority of site consists of poorly drained soils; Extreme northern portion of site characterized by wetlands	Costs to extend sewer, poorly drained soils, and overly large size make this area a poor choice for siting and marketing a planned commercial or industrial development
2	55	LI-1	Open	Expensive	Moderate	High	High	Majority of site consists of moderately well drained soils	Costs to extend sewer make this site a poor choice for siting and marketing a planned commercial or industrial development in the near-term; High visibility on Route 13 make potential development as commercial or customer-focused light industrial use feasible in the intermediate-term
3	28	LI-1	Salvage	Expensive	Moderate	High	High	Somewhat excessively drained soils; unknown remediation needs associated with existing use	Costs to extend sewer, small size, and existing use make this site a poor choice for siting and marketing a planned commercial or industrial development
4	26	C-1	Open/Car Store	Inexpensive	Moderate	High	High	Majority of site consists of moderately well drained soils; wetlands at north of site	Limited costs to extend sewer, high visibility on Route 13, and moderate accessibility from Discountland Road and Route 13 make this site a good choice for a small-scale planned commercial development
5	127	R-1	Open	Inexpensive	Easy	Low	Low	Majority of site consists of moderately well drained soils	Low visibility and lack of compatibility with residential surroundings make this area a less than ideal choice for potential planned commercial or industrial development; Development in this manner would necessitate rezoning and proper screening from surrounding uses



Analysis of potential industrial/business park sites in Laurel, continued

Area	Acres	Zoning	Existing Use	Sewer cost	Accessibility	Visibility	Area Compatibility	Envrionmental Considerations	Summary Assessment
6	129	C-1	Open	Inexpensive	Easy	Moderate	High	Majority of site consists of moderately well drained soil; approximately 20 acres of wetlands at southeastern corner of site	Low costs of sewer service extension, easy access to site from Discountland Road, ideal size, and compatibility with warehouse style uses in area make this site an ideal choice for planned light industrial development; Rezoning necessary to accommodate LI uses in campus setting
7	31	C-1	Open	Inexpensive	Moderate	High	High	Consists of moderately well drained soils	High visibility site with access to Route 13 makes this a good choice for a small-scale planned commercial development
8	78	C-1	Open	Moderate	Moderate	High	High	Consists of moderately well drained soils with somewhat poorly drained soils along Route 13 frontage	Moderate costs to extend sewer service along with high visibility of site along Route 13 makes this a candidate for reserving as C-1 zoning in near-term, with potential for reassessment in intermediate term
9	55	C-1	Open	Moderate	Moderate	High	Moderate	Consists primarily of moderately well drained soils; wetlands along western edge of site	High visibility site with access to Route 13 and moderate costs of sewer service extension makes this a candidate for reserving as C-1 zoning in near-term, with potential for reassessment in intermediate term

Source: University of Delaware Institute for Public Administration

Continued from page 55

As noted, analysis of parcels is just one of the two components of the University project. More detailed recommendations on sectors and marketing will be provided. Delaware has examples of successful and not-so-successful industrial and business parks. If developed strategically, they will have more positive impact on Laurel’s economy than fast-food or chain retail businesses along US 13.

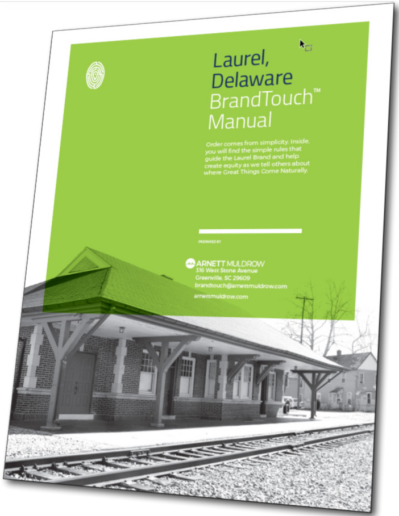
It is important to remember that Laurel’s median household is the lowest in the state at \$33,387, according to the US Census 2010-2015 American Community Survey. The median worker income is \$20,924. So the town should seek jobs that raise the income of its citizens and not focus on retail and service jobs that keep wages low and stagnant. Figure 6-5 on page 55 offers an occupational sampling of weekly and annual wages in Sussex County.

5. Incorporate Laurel’s new brand more thoroughly

Since it was adopted in 2016, Laurel’s new brand has received limited use. Some banners are on display; the town adopted the town seal variation of the brand logo; and the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation is using the logo. Ben Muldrow, who created the brand with input from town leaders and stakeholders, provided an entire marketing package and [manual](#) to go along with the brand.

One idea from the branding effort that came to life was the community painting of a watermelon bus in July 2016. One of the roofless buses used to transport melons to market was donated and painted with scenes from Laurel’s history and local culture.

As Laurel develops a more focused economic development strategy, hopefully with an engaged group of stakeholders who steer the effort, that information should be referenced and put to use. Signage, community events, Laurel-based organizations, marketing and advertising materials, letterhead and gear should all use the brand.



Click on the cover to view the manual for usage of Laurel’s brand.





# Environmental Sustainability 7

## A FOCUS ON PROTECTING LAUREL'S GREATEST NATURAL ASSET

The leaders and citizens of Laurel recognize Broad Creek's location in the Upper Nanticoke Watershed and its relationship to the Chesapeake Bay. They also view Broad Creek as the town's most valuable natural asset.

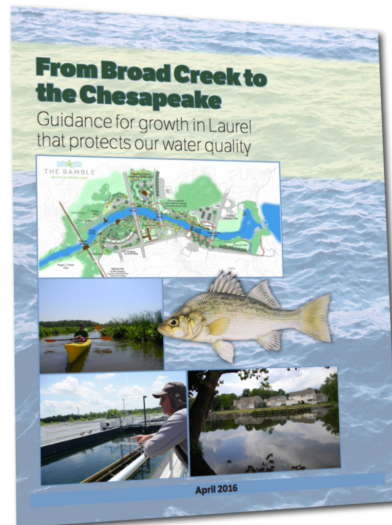
One of four overarching goals in Laurel's Downtown Development District Plan is "Protect Broad Creek from pollution, erosion and uses that devalue it." Also, the fourth of six guiding principles adopted by Laurel's Plan Advisory Team is: "We recognize Broad Creek as our greatest natural asset and a focal point for recreation, relaxation, nature tourism and sustainable waterfront development."

Laurel is one of two municipalities within Delaware's Chesapeake watershed to complete and adopt its own municipal-level Watershed Improvement Plan to meet federal and state water quality goals for nutrient pollution (nitrogen, phosphorous and sediment). Those established pollution limits are referred to as a Total Maximum Daily Load, or TMDL, and are expected to be achieved by 2025. Laurel's baseline and goals are shown in Fig. 7-3.

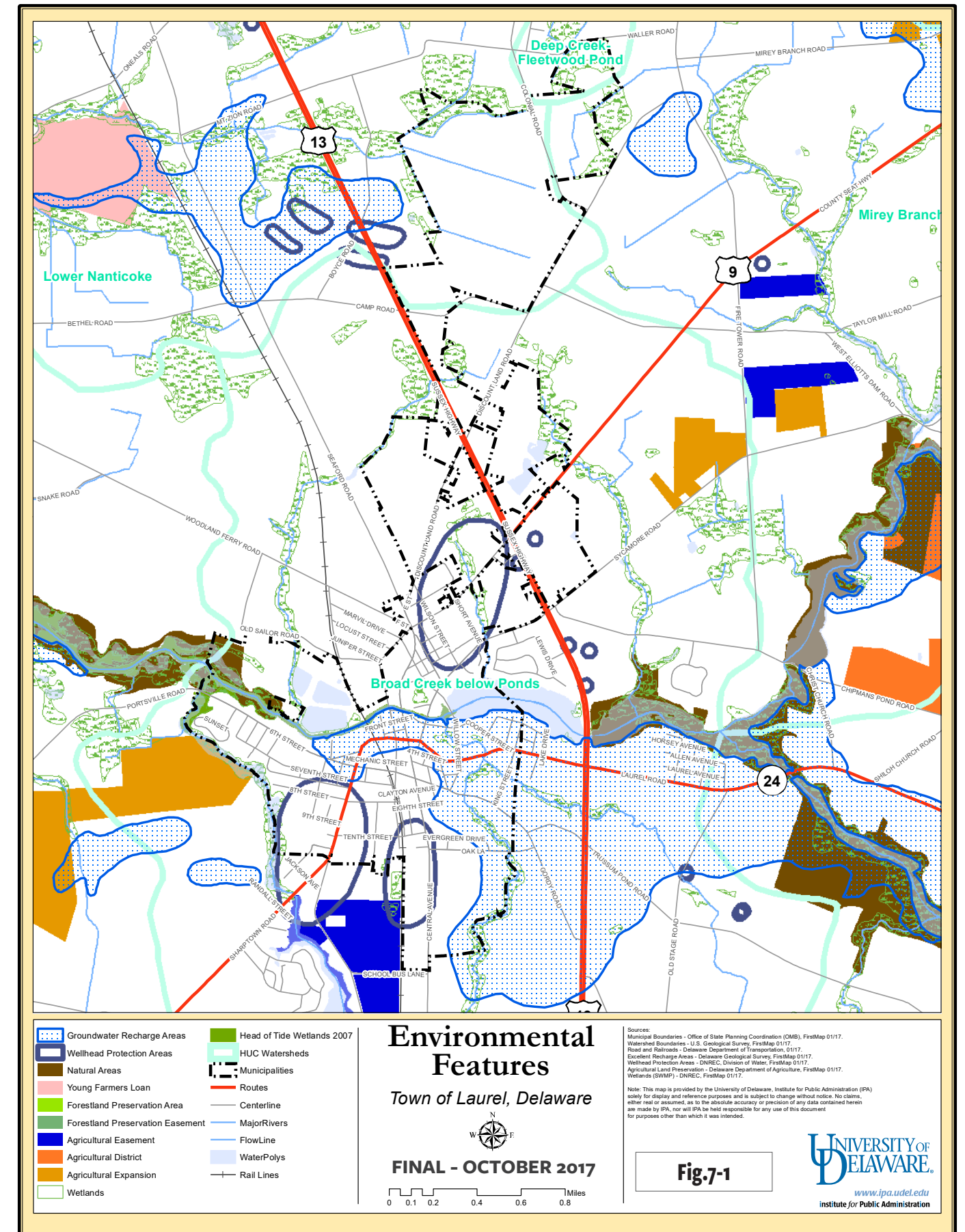
That [detailed report](#) with recommendations specifically for Laurel is titled "From Broad Creek to the Chesapeake: Guidance for Growth in Laurel that protects our Water Quality." This section recaps the major themes of that report.

As described in the report, the town has made significant investments in protecting water quality along Broad Creek:

- Laurel's wastewater treatment facility was designed to meet tougher Maryland Enhanced Nutrient Removal (ENR) standards of 3.0 mg/liter of total nitrogen and .3 mg/liter of total phosphorous — considered the limit of current technology. Without any modifications or plant upgrades, Laurel will meet the slightly less stringent TMDL targets for discharge into Broad Creek;
- Because the treatment plant is operating at less than half of its 700,000 gallon-per-day capacity, Laurel has room to grow in an efficient manner;
- Laurel is completing a project along its U.S. 13 corridor that connected the equivalent of 138 Equivalent Dwelling Units (EDUs) to its wastewater treatment plant;
- Low-impact redevelopment efforts along Broad Creek (e.g., The Ramble) are focused on green infrastructure practices, restoration and buffering any new development from the creek and floodplain;



Click to view this report and recommendations, adopted by Laurel's Town Council in December 2016.





- An ambitious \$1.56 million stormwater retrofit project along Sixth Street will address sewer backup issues in town and remove nitrogen and phosphorous from Broad Creek; and
- Laurel is focused on revitalizing its downtown business and residential district, which would utilize existing infrastructure and likely not add to nutrient loads or require an offset.

### Laurel’s wastewater treatment plant



Significant water and wastewater upgrades are being funded by US Department of Agriculture Rural Development.

In November 2016, Laurel received a five-year permit renewal for its wastewater treatment plant under the National Pollution Discharge and Elimination System (NPDES) program. The \$11 million wastewater treatment plant upgrade to Enhanced Nutrient Removal (ENR) technology went on line in 2008. It was the first treatment plant in Delaware to meet the more stringent Chesapeake water quality requirements (TMDLs) adopted in 2000.

The plant’s current design flow is 700,000 gallons per day, and peak flow is 800,000 gallons per day, according to a Delaware Statewide Assessment of Wastewater Facilities completed in 2012. The plant is currently operating at about 350,000 gallons per day, and town officials estimate that the plant will serve Laurel for at least another 20 years. While the DNREC assessment projected an anticipated flow in 2020 of 1 million gallons per day, a large planned mixed-use development at the north end of town never materialized.

DNREC estimates that most small residential onsite systems in proper working order discharge nitrogen at 50 mg/liter. Delaware’s new on-site wastewater disposal regulations require that new and replacement systems within 1,000 feet of Chesapeake Bay tidal waters, which includes Broad Creek, will be required to treat to an advanced performance standard (PSN3) of 20 mg/liter of nitrogen. Small commer-

cial systems with flows up to 20,000 gallons per day also would have to meet this advanced treatment standard, according to the new regulations.

Laurel’s plant treats effluent to a standard that is 500% (20 mg/l N vs. 4mg/l N) to 12,500% (50 mg/L N vs. 4 mg/L N) better than advanced treatment or standard systems, respectively. See Fig. 7-2.

The treatment plant’s waste load allocation (Fig. 7-4, next page) indicates substantial room for growth in the town. The waste load allocation, included in Delaware’s Watershed Improvement Plan (WIP) and accepted by the US Environmental Protection Agency, represents the amount of nutrient pollution (nitrogen, phosphorous and sediment) the plant can discharge into Broad Creek.

As discussed throughout this plan, redevelopment and infill are a strategy not only for economic revitalization, but also for limiting sprawling development and its effect on water quality. For example, Laurel is completing the second phase of a corridor improvement project along U.S. 13 that extends sewer service to 62 properties, removing the equivalent of 138 EDUs from onsite septic systems.

Fig. 7.3: Nutrient Baseline and Goals for Laurel

This table shows Laurel’s baseline, or starting point, for loads of nitrogen, phosphorous and sediment. It is segmented by various land uses within the town limits. Laurel (urban land use) needs to maintain its 2011 base of 7,373 pounds/year of nitrogen and 309 pounds/year of phosphorous. It will not be required to reduce those loads. However, under the Watershed Implementation Plan, Laurel would be required

to offset any development that increases nutrient loading above the 2011 baseline. As of December 2016, no formal offset program or means of tracking these pollutants at the municipal level has been proposed. Voluntary actions are planned to meet the reduction targets of 33 percent for agricultural uses (feeding operations, harvested forest, pasture/hay, and row crops).

		2011 Total Nitrogen (lbs/year)	2025 Target Total Nitrogen (lbs/yeat)	2011 Total Phosphorous (lbs/year)	2025 Target Total Phosphorous (lbs/year)	2011 Total Suspended Solids (TSS) (lbs/year)	2025 Target TSS (lbs./year)
Land use	Acres						
Construction	3.17	69.91	47.16	10.31	6.96	1,982.38	1540.84
Feeding operations	0.33	1,525.86	1,029.40	243.09	163.94	3.49	2.71
Forest	224.71	448.01	448.01	7.80	7.80	633.04	633.04
Harvested forest	3.45	48.23	32.54	0.71	0.48	156.01	121.26
Pasture/hay	1.22	4.62	3.11	0.49	0.33	10.85	8.43
Row crops	610.98	10,237.69	6,906.73	682.80	460.48	15,246.62	11,850.71
Urban	801.85	7,373.08	7,378.08	308.99	308.99	40,326.41	40,326.71
Water	71.03	1,214.94	1,214.94	44.78	44.78	0.00	0.00

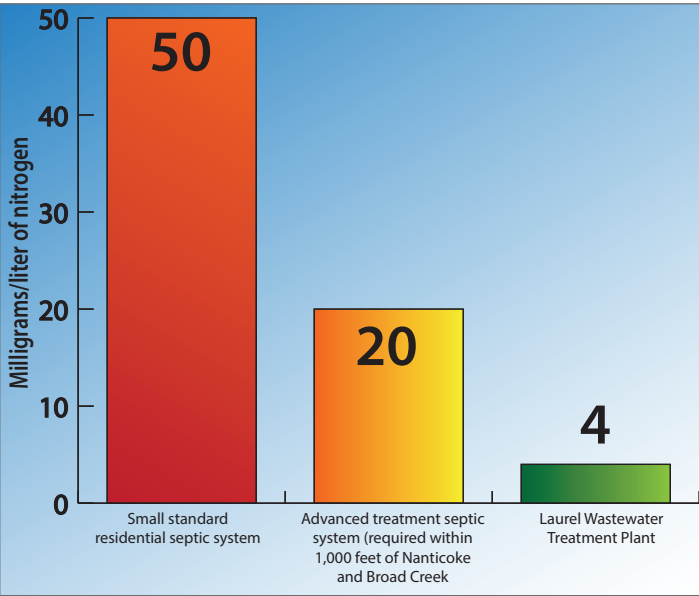
Source: Watershed Management and Assessment Section, Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control.

Fig.7-2

### Laurel plant already meets Chesapeake standards

This chart shows how effective Laurel’s Wastewater Treatment Plant is in preventing nitrogen pollution of Broad Creek. Its effluent meets the Chesapeake TMDL standard of 4 milligrams/liter when discharged into the creek.

A typical residential standard (gravity) septic system discharges 50 mg/liter of ntriogen into grounwater. An advanced treatment septic system, required within 1,000 feet of the Nanticoke River and Broad Creek, discharges 20 mg/liter of nitrogen. (Numbers from DNREC)





The \$12 million project was funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and included significant water and wastewater infrastructure upgrades, including a new water tower and regional pump station. A third phase is possible.

A map in Chapter 9, page 88, shows where wastewater service is now available in Laurel.

Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) requirements

Laurel’s wastewater treatment plant is an example of a “point source” with a specific discharge from a pipe or drain. Within the Nanticoke watershed, there are also “non-point” sources of water pollution to be regulated—from fertilizer runoff to polluted stormwater in urbanized areas. Towns in southwestern Sussex County will be required to obtain Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) permits for their stormwater conveyance systems. As of the 2010 U.S. Census, Laurel falls within the Salisbury, MD-DE Metropolitan Statistical Area. Towns within these urbanizing areas are federally required to seek a Phase II MS4 permit to prevent and manage stormwater pollution – runoff from streets, parking lots, roofs, and other paved and manmade surfaces.

Under federal regulations, Laurel may qualify for a waiver from this program. The Maryland Department of the Environment is seeking a waiver for the towns of Delmar, Fruitland and Hebron in Wicomico County.

The MS4 permit will compel towns to comply with TMDL requirements for their urban loads as a condition of their federal permit. It represents a regulatory “stick” that has not existed before except in larger urbanized areas such as New Castle County, Dover, Newark and Middletown.

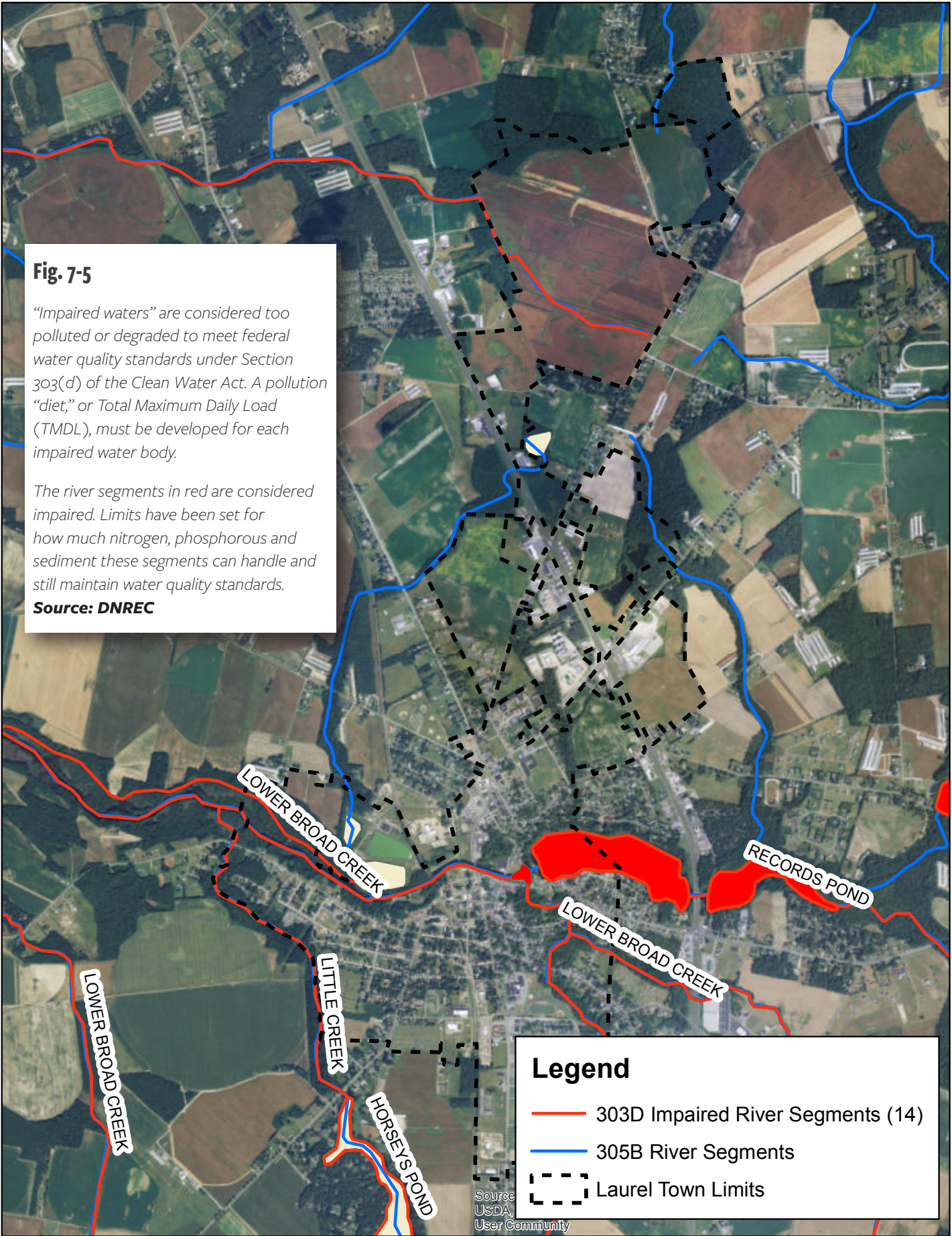
As of December 2016, DNREC’s Surface Water Discharges Section was continuing to develop a Phase II permit covering the towns of Laurel, Seaford, Delmar and Blades. Towns will be required to submit a Storm Water Pollution Prevention and Management Plan to the agency and cover six areas:

- **Public Education and Outreach**—Distributing educational materials and performing outreach to inform citizens about the impacts polluted stormwater runoff discharges can have on water quality.

Waste Load Allocation for Laurel’s Treatment Plant Fig.7-4

Fig. 7-4	Total Nitrogen		Total Phosphorous	
	Concentration (milligrams/liter)	Waste load allocation (lbs./yr)	Concentration (milligrams/liter)	Waste load allocation (lbs/yr)
Target	4.0	8,529	1.0	2,132
Actual		6,653		1,256
Room for growth		1,876		876

Source: Phase 2 Watershed Implementation Plan (2010), DNREC, page 44







Under planned Municipal Storm Water regulations, Laurel will be required to regulate stormwater runoff down to the level of homes and businesses.

- **Public Participation/Involvement**—Providing opportunities for citizens to participate in program development and implementation, including effectively publicizing public hearings and/or encouraging citizen representatives on a stormwater management panel.
- **Illicit Discharge Detection and Elimination**—Developing and implementing a plan to detect and eliminate illicit discharges to the storm sewer system (includes developing a system map and informing the community about hazards associated with illegal discharges and improper disposal of waste).
- **Construction Site Runoff Control**—Developing, implementing, and enforcing an erosion and sediment control program for construction activities that disturb 1 or more acres of land (controls could include silt fences and temporary stormwater detention ponds).
- **Post-Construction Runoff Control**—Developing, implementing, and enforcing a program to address discharges of post-construction stormwater runoff from new development and redevelopment areas. Applicable controls could include preventative actions such as protecting sensitive areas (e.g., wetlands) or the use of structural BMPs such as grassed swales or porous pavement.
- **Pollution Prevention/Good Housekeeping** —Developing and implementing a program with the goal of preventing or reducing pollutant runoff from municipal operations. The program must include municipal staff training on pollution prevention measures and techniques (e.g., regular street sweeping, reduction in the use of pesticides or street salt, or frequent catch-basin cleaning).

Small towns such as Laurel are concerned about having the capacity and resources to implement such a program. When Town Council passed a resolution adopting its Watershed Improvement Plan report in December 2016, it requested financial and technical assistance from the state to implement MS4s when the time comes.

**New state onsite wastewater regulations**

Delaware also adopted new onsite wastewater regulations in 2014. The regulations keep pace with changes in technology for large and small systems, protect public health and reduce pollution in groundwater, streams, rivers and bays, helping the state meet its water quality goals. The changes correspond to regulations in effect for the past several years in Delaware’s Inland Bays Watershed. They also protect homebuyers from acquiring malfunctioning septic systems.

Most notably for Laurel, the regulations require the upgrade of all new and replacement systems within 1,000 feet of tidal portions of the Nanticoke River and Broad

Creek, which will assist Delaware in meeting federal targets to clean up the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. An analysis of septic data provided by DNREC indicated that within Laurel’s annexation area there are 35 septic systems located within that 1,000-foot buffer.

**Laurel’s stormwater retrofit project**

Laurel experiences some spikes in pollutant levels in Broad Creek because of a series of 10 catch basins along 6th Street that are tied into the sewer system. During heavy rains, the stormwater runoff causes the sewer to back up and overflow manhole covers, and Laurel had to treat an influx of polluted rainwater.

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation provided funding to design a remedy for the Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO). A new storm drain line and biofiltration units will be added to the catch basins to capture excess nitrogen and phosphorous. The units usually have a planting in the middle to absorb runoff. In some cases, where there is not enough space for the units because of sidewalk restraints or retaining walls, they will be installed at another location in town with a catch basin.

The project is estimated to cost \$1.56 million. The state Water Infrastructure Advisory Council approved financing for the project, including 100 percent loan forgiveness, in October 2015. As of December 2016, the project had been permitted and is scheduled to begin in the summer of 2017.

The retrofit project will capture an estimated 2 pounds per year of phosphorous and 8.5 pounds per year of nitrogen and keep those pollutants out of Broad Creek, according to the project’s engineering firm. Those reductions should be credited to the town if offsets are required in the future.

**Source water protection**

Delaware Code Title 7, §6082 requires that municipalities with a population of 2,000 persons or more “shall adopt as part of the update and implementation of the 2007 Comprehensive Land Use Plans, the overlay maps delineating, as critical areas, source water assessment, wellhead protection and excellent ground-water recharge potential areas. Furthermore, the counties and municipalities shall adopt, by December 31, 2007, regulations governing the use of land within those critical areas designed to protect those critical areas from activities and substances that may harm water quality and subtract from overall water quantity.”

As a town with a population of 3,842 (2014), Laurel is required to have an ordinance that protects its sources of water - its wellheads and areas where the recharge of groundwater is geologically optimized. Laurel adopted a [Source Water Protection ordinance](#) in 2009.



A map depicting both Wellhead Protection Areas and Excellent Recharge Areas was not included along with the ordinance adopted by the town. The most current map of these resources is shown in Fig. 7-6 at right and will be adopted by Town Council to be included with the ordinance. The regulatory provisions of the ordinance will clarify, if necessary, that they refer to the most current source water protection datasets.

The ordinance follows the guidance provided by both DNREC and the Delaware Rural Water Association and includes the table of uses permitted and prohibited within Wellhead Protection Zones and Excellent Recharge Areas. It includes limits on impervious cover and requires an Environmental Impact Assessment Report, including a climactic water budget, if impervious cover exceeds 30 percent.

This plan will recommend that the ordinance be amended to include the required map and also more leeway for redevelopment in blighted areas, especially within the Downtown Development District. Bridgeville and Milford ordinances both include a higher impervious cover threshold for redevelopment.

**Town should consider action on tree canopy**

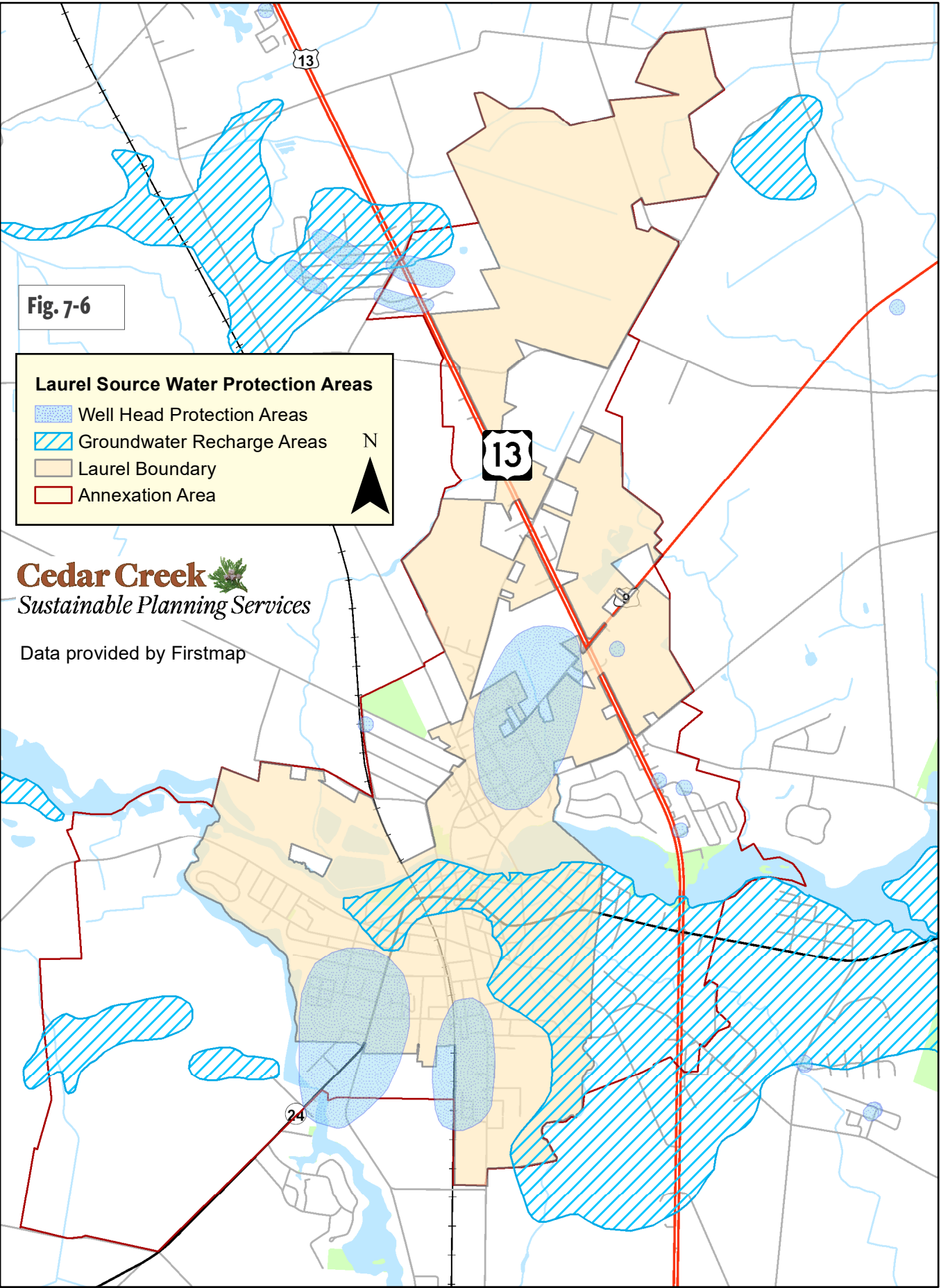
The Watershed Implementation Plan (page 236) estimated Laurel’s tree canopy within 100-foot riparian (streamside) buffers at 49 percent, or 98 of 198 acres. Overall within municipal boundaries, the Delaware Forest Service estimated the town’s urban tree canopy at 20.4 percent. A recent recalculation puts the percentage at 21.18%, according to DNREC.

Besides being attractive and providing shade, trees and tree canopy modify stormwater runoff in two ways: by reducing the impact from precipitation and by treating stormwater runoff flowing from other lands. Tree structure—from roots to canopy—allow for greater interception of precipitation and more opportunity/time for evapotranspiration (ET) and water infiltration into soils to occur.

Modeling results suggest that the urban forest canopy reduces stormwater runoff volumes by 8-27% more than grass and is more effective over impervious surfaces than over pervious areas.<sup>1</sup>

Laurel mentioned urban tree canopy extensively in its 2011 comprehensive plan. The town set a 10-year overall canopy of 30.4%; however, there was no followup with a corresponding ordinance, resolution or development standards for tree preservation and planting. Besides their attractiveness, trees are a relatively cost-effective means of protecting water quality.

<sup>1</sup> “Information and Citations on Urban Tree Canopy and Water Quality,” retrieved from [http://www.chesapeakebay.net/channel\\_files/22534/summary\\_utc\\_benefits\\_for\\_cbwm\\_\(3\).pdf](http://www.chesapeakebay.net/channel_files/22534/summary_utc_benefits_for_cbwm_(3).pdf)





THE RAMBLE: LOW IMPACT DEVELOPMENT AND GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

The Ramble redevelopment plan already has been discussed in the Community Development section of this plan. The Ramble is a mixed-use project along Laurel’s Broad Creek waterfront, envisioned and embraced by town citizens and leaders. It includes a pocket neighborhood of camp-style cottages; a nature-based playground with a Native American theme; a kayak launch that has already been built; a network of trails that will link to Roger Fisher Park to the west and the Records Pond fishing area to the east; a Village Green area with shops; and an outdoor wetlands educational “classroom.” Eventually, there will be a new pedestrian bridge in the vicinity of the Poplar Street bridge.

The Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control already has helped fund a [Phase One Environmental Assessment](#) of the entire Ramble area, as well as a [feasibility study](#) and cost estimates for various green infrastructure best management practices appropriate for the various segments of the project.

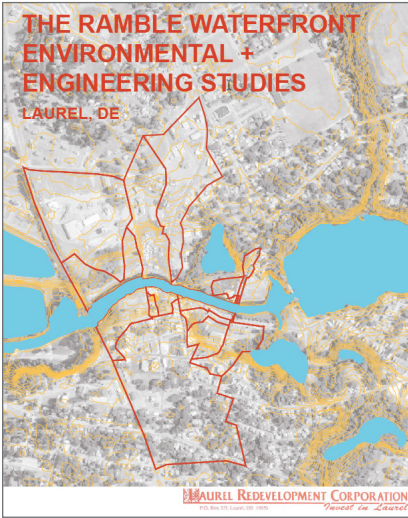
With additional funding from DNREC, designs for a constructed wetland and bioretention swales for the playground can move forward. Complete schematic designs for the playground have been completed; equipment has been designed and priced. Fundraising will begin in 2017.

The Laurel Redevelopment Corporation has identified a potential developer for the cottages, and the goal is to design them to earn a LEED for Homes certification with a net-zero impact on water quality.

Preliminary landscaping standards call for use of native, non-invasive plants. Laurel’s WIP report goes farther and recommends establishing a goose-control program, making the proposed cottages a model of sustainable design, and setting up The Ramble redevelopment to function as a “credit bank” if offsets of new pollutant loads are officially required to satisfy the water-quality requirements along Broad Creek.

The Ramble, with its focus on landscape architecture and ecological design, presents an opportunity to model best management practices for water quality. As this project was not included in Laurel’s 2011 baseline for nitrogen, phosphorous and sediment, any BMPs implemented here should be calculated, documented and credited to the town as a potential offset against other projects elsewhere in Laurel that may increase nutrient loads.

Such a calculation should be a requirement for any proposed BMP in The Ramble or elsewhere throughout town. (For example, reduction in nitrogen and phosphorous loads were calculated for the proposed stormwater retrofit project that will eliminate combined sewer overflows in town.)



Click to view the green infrastructure feasibility study. This study contains detailed information about water depths, soil types, tides, hydrology, sea level rise, shoreline conditions, outfalls and vegetation along Broad Creek.



Green infrastructure stormwater practices are planned for The Ramble’s nature-based playground. Click on the artwork to view the schematics design. Note: This is a large file.

The table at right (Fig. 7-7) is from the original 2014 [University of Delaware proposal](#) for environmentally sensitive redevelopment along Broad Creek.

Flooding, sea level rise and zoning

The Ramble Waterfront Environmental and Engineering Studies funded by DNREC clearly delineated flood zones and sea level rise scenarios along the Broad Creek waterfront and took them into account when proposing green infrastructure stormwater techniques for the various elements of The Ramble.

The federal flood map data are depicted in Fig. 7-7, but much more detail is provided in the [Foresight report](#).

Most parcels within The Ramble project are zoned Marine-Resources. According to Laurel’s [zoning code](#), “the intent of the Marine Resources use district established in this Section is to recognize the unique role which Broad Creek and its waterfront areas have played in the formation, growth and life of The Town of Laurel. The objectives of this District are:

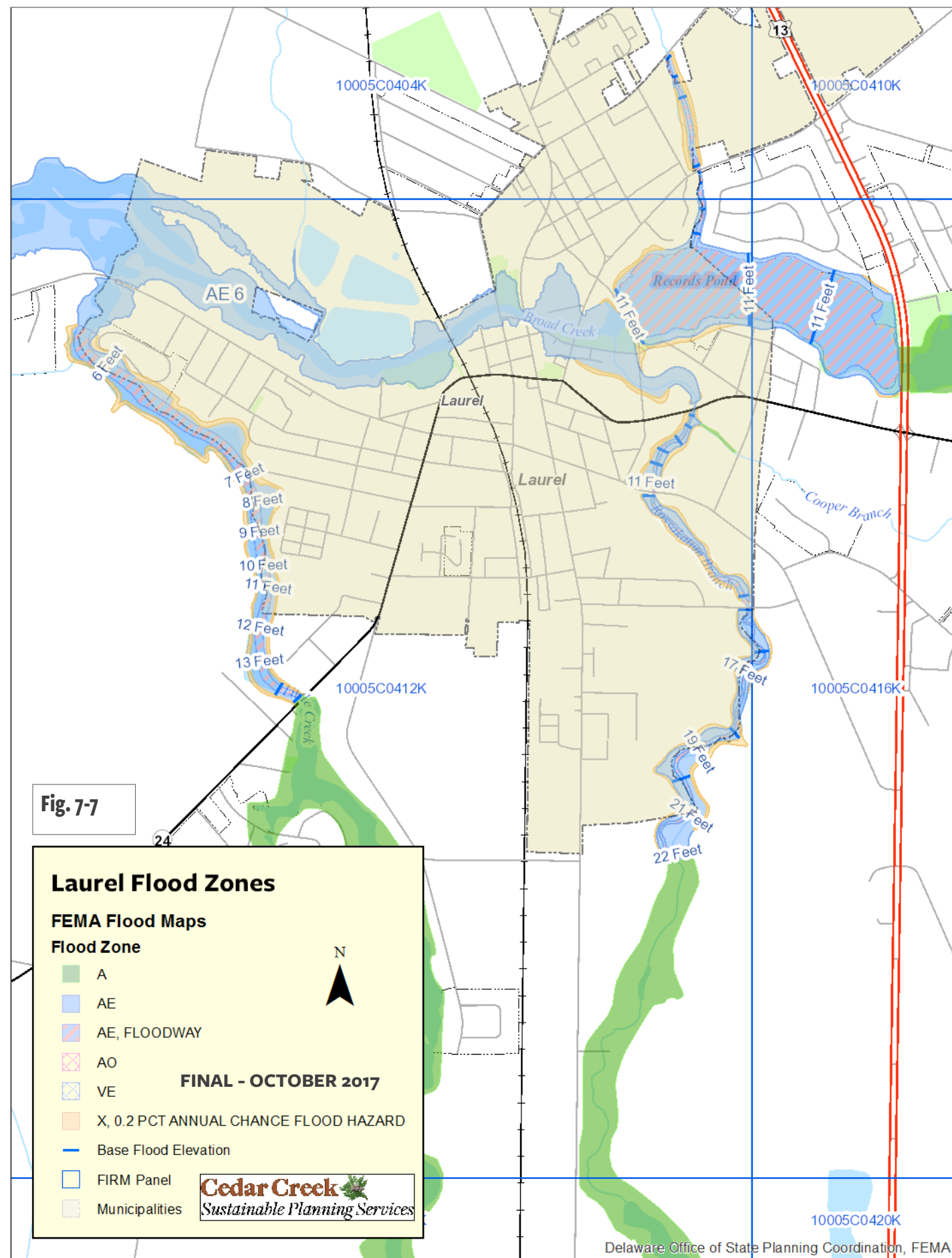
1. To provide for a compatible mixture of waterfront-related uses, including recreational, park, open space and boating uses;
2. To encourage appropriate land development, including the utilization of land and buildings and the adaptive reuse of existing structures, which is in harmony with

Fig. 7-7 Promoting Ecological Design in Laurel

Aspect	Recommendation
Water	Adopt open drainage systems (i.e. swales, ditches, dry stone beds) to convey storm water and renovate closed systems (i.e. piping, drain inlets, catch basins) if necessary, to improve water quality of Broad Creek
	Restrict development within the 100-year floodplan
	Curtail the use of impervious surfaces and adopt green parking strategies
	Use rain barrels on new development and encourage use on existing buildings within The Ramble
Soils	Consult experts at DNREC and the Army Corps of Engineers for best practices
	Protect soils by controlling for erosion during and after construction
Vegetation	Amend soils based on analysis to promote favorable conditions for trees
	Plant native trees and eliminate exotic invasives
	Plant large deciduous trees to minimize heat island effect
	Plant in layers, including large, medium and small trees as well as masses of shrubs and perennials
Wildlife	Use best management practices for landscape maintenance, including appropriately timed fertilizer applications and limited herbicide and pesticide usage based on Integrated Pest Management Plan for landscape maintenance that allows for natural succession
	Create Laurel Greening Programs (i.e. tree planting, town environmental amenities, street planters and flower baskets).
Land Use	Plan for integration of other organisms into the landscape (wildlife, birds and insects)
	Conserve public open space
	Reclaim and restore any brownfield lands

Source: University of Delaware





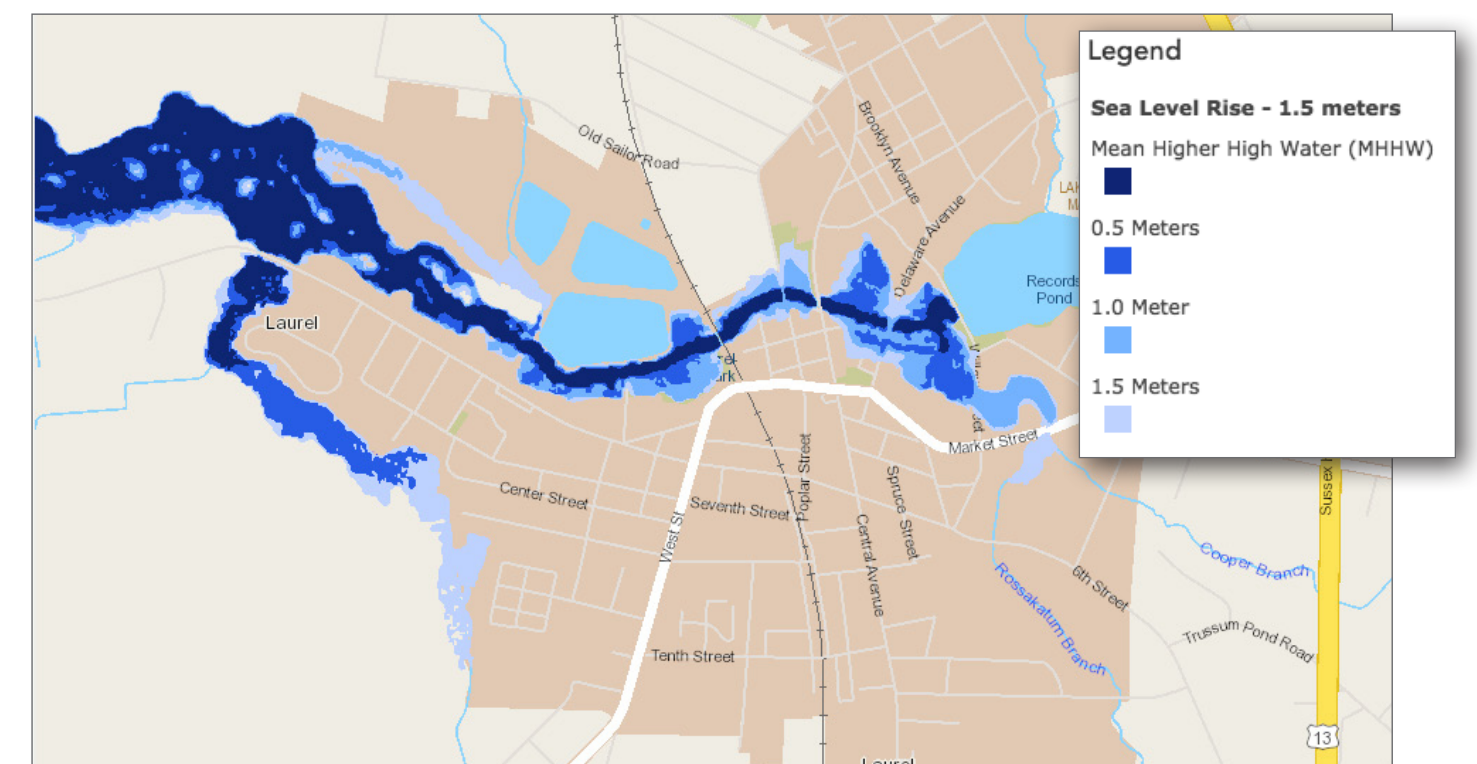
the conservation of the district's general recreational and open space character and the historic environmental areas adjacent to the creek;

3. To recognize the sensitivity of the unique waterfront environment in this area and reinforce appropriate safeguards to protect the area from periodic flooding, soil erosion, sedimentation and slope failure due to unregulated construction, removal of vegetation, dredging, filling, damming or channelization;
4. To further protect scenic views of the creek; and
5. To encourage public access to the creek."

The code goes on to list permitted uses, some of which may be in conflict with the stated intent of the Marine Resources zoning district. This plan recommends reviewing the permitted uses within the Marine Resources zone and adding requirements that will protect water quality, property and public safety, scenic views, and the passive recreation pursuits that Laurel has decided to emphasize.

Changes to the zone could include a vegetated buffer between development and the water body; tree canopy requirements; clustering of development to avoid excess impervious cover; and other low-impact development practices. Impervious cover created by roads, driveways, roofs, parking lots and other manmade surfaces could increase periodic flooding along the waterfront.

If Laurel residents wish to protect Broad Creek, both as its prized natural asset and as an economic development driver that will attract tourists interested in nature and





passive recreation, the town needs to take clear steps to safeguard the qualities that make it attractive to people who fish, paddle, watch birds, and take nature photos—or just observe it from a restaurant deck or back porch.

PARKS AND RECREATIONAL NEEDS



Roger Fisher Park (formerly Riverview Park) includes a DNREC maintained boat ramp west of the railroad trestle. The trestle and hard-to-find downhill entrance off Market Street creates a secluded feeling once inside the park.

Delaware’s 2013-2018 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) provides guidance for needed investments in outdoor recreation facilities and related needs. Laurel lies within SCORP Planning Region 4. Within that western Sussex County region, 66 percent of survey respondents said outdoor recreation was very important to them personally.

The report identifies these needs for western Sussex County:

High facility needs:

- Walking and Jogging Paths
- Public Swimming Pools
- Hiking Trails
- Fishing Areas
- Community Gardens
- Playgrounds
- Bicycle Paths
- Basketball Courts
- Picnic Areas
- Off-Leash Dog Areas

Moderate facility needs:

- Camping Areas
- Football Fields
- Ball Fields
- Boat Access
- Soccer Fields
- Canoe/Kayak Launches
- Skateboarding Areas
- Public Golf Courses
- Tennis Courts

For a rural small town, Laurel has an impressive selection of parks and fishing areas. Roger Fisher Park has a boat launch, and Records Pond has a fishing pier; both are DNREC-maintained facilities and they are recreational bookends along the Broad Creek waterfront.

One of the recommendations of this plan is to work with DNREC to improve the entrance to Roger Fisher Park and ensure that it is clearly linked to The Ramble and the rest of Laurel’s waterfront. The current entrance is narrow, difficult to locate and overshadowed by a used car lot, creating a sense of seclusion that hinders use of the park.

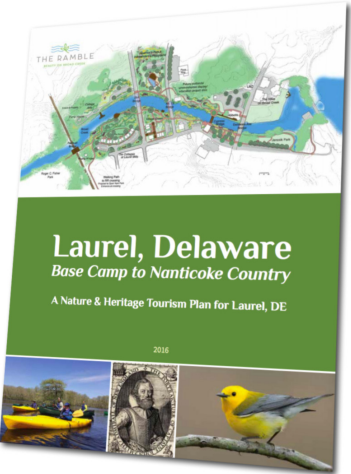
In 2016, the Nanticoke Rotary funded and built the kayak launch that is recommended in The Ramble waterfront redevelopment plan. A stand-up paddleboard and kayak rental vendor operated from the launch in the summer of 2016.

Also part of The Ramble, a nature-based playground has been designed with to a Native American story-telling theme; schematic drawings, along with individual equipment designs and pricing, have been completed. Fundraising to build the project will begin in 2017. This is a unique concept in this region, although it has been very successful elsewhere, and fits well with DNREC’s “No Child Left Outside” initiative.

A trail network is planned for The Ramble that will link Roger Fisher Park and Records Pond and serve as a recreational asset to residents and visitors. As of December 2016, no funding has been identified for the trail network.

These amenities build on Laurel’s intention to position itself as a gateway, or “base camp,” for nature and heritage tourism activities in the Nanticoke region.

The Laurel Redevelopment Corporation has reclaimed blighted properties and industrial sites along the waterfront and in Laurel’s business district, creating three parks: Janosik Park, Venables Park and Market Square Park.



Laurel’s nature and heritage tourism plan suggests many opportunities for outdoor recreation. Click on the report to view it.



Laurel needs to take precautions so that additional development along the waterfront will not further exacerbate flooding and endanger property and people.



### Repurposing of Dunbar Elementary

This plan is including in its recommendations the repurposing of Dunbar Elementary School into a police headquarters and community center that could include a gym (already there) or other recreational facilities. Such a facility could serve multiple purposes on the western side of Laurel.

Dunbar is a historic African-American school built by the du Pont family and now serving levels pre-kindergarten through first grade. A new elementary school will open in 2018 and Dunbar will close.

# **Transportation and mobility** 8

## THE ROAD TO A MORE COMPLETE AND HEALTHY COMMUNITY

Laurel is crisscrossed by US 13, Central Avenue, Del. 24 and Poplar Street. Four bridges span Broad Creek in downtown Laurel along a stretch of only 0.3 miles. There is a lot of infrastructure within a relatively small area. Given the historic nature of the town and the fact that downtown Laurel does not follow a grid-like layout, the traffic volume can seem daunting to pedestrians and cyclists.

With its Downtown Development District designation and a vision for attracting residents and businesses to downtown Laurel, the town has an excellent opportunity to become an attractive and walkable small rural town. A good indicator of car dependency vs. walkability is the Walk Score, which uses a [patented methodology](#) to gauge the walkability of any address in the United States on a scale of 0 to 100. For example, the neighborhood around the library has a [Walk Score of 66](#), considered “somewhat walkable” to stores, parks, work and other amenities.

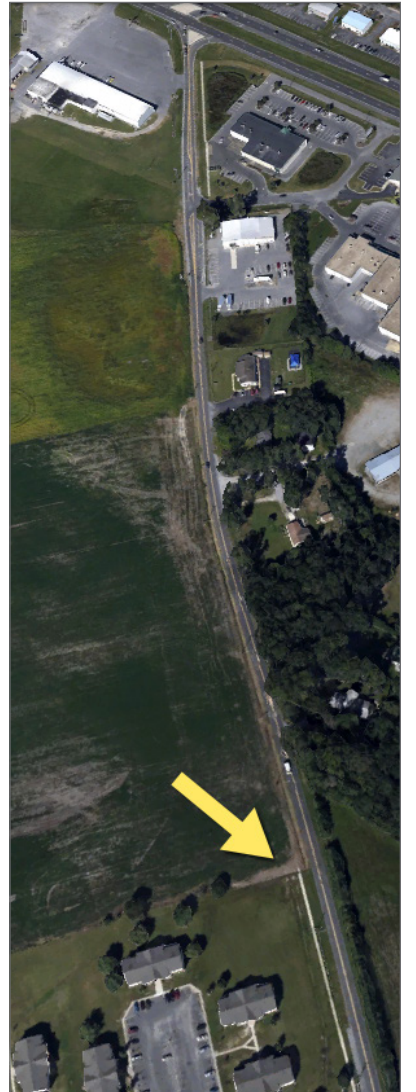
Why does this matter? Besides the obvious health benefit, walkable neighborhoods are desirable places to live. Property values tend to be higher, with fewer foreclosures, and crime lower. Being able to walk to school, church, a grocery store, and satisfy other daily needs on foot is a sign of community vitality and completeness.

### Sidewalk along Discountland Road a priority for town

Other sections of Laurel do not score as high as the library. For example, there are no sidewalks for the full length of Discountland Road between Alternate US 13 (Seaford Road) and US 13. Residents who live in Hollybrook Apartments and Carvel Gardens must negotiate a half-mile stretch of this road when walking to Food Lion and other stores along the highway. The [Walk Score](#) for Holly Brook is 25 out of 100, meaning that residents are mostly car-dependent for every aspect of their daily lives.

Extending sidewalks and adding bicycle lanes along the road was mentioned in Sussex County’s 2018-2023 Capital Transportation Program [request](#) to DelDOT. The need for sidewalks also was mentioned in Laurel’s 2011 Comprehensive Plan. Especially if this section of Laurel is to grow as a residential area, sidewalks (and bike lanes) become a necessary safety feature. Walkability within a residential area is important because it can improve health and quality of life for residents, as well as reduce traffic

DelDOT has included the project in its Fiscal Year 2018-Fiscal Year 2023 Capital Transportation Program. However, preliminary engineering for the project is not scheduled to begin until Fiscal Year 2021. A three-year engineering budget totals \$450,000.



Yellow arrow indicates where sidewalk ends on Discountland Road from Hollybrook Apartments east to US 13.



Although there is no detailed scope of work, DelDOT says the project could include a shared-use pedestrian/bicycle path, a widening of the road itself, and other safety improvements. DelDOT will work with the town as the project is developed.

### Poplar Street bridge and foot traffic

The Poplar Street bridge is a historic, one-lane bridge with no means for pedestrians to safely approach or cross it. There are significant efforts underway in this section of Laurel to add mixed-use development, rehabilitate homes and commercial buildings, and build a new pocket neighborhood of cottages on the water there. A nature-based playground has also been designed, and a kayak launch has been built adjacent to the bridge.

The Ramble project calls for a new pedestrian bridge over Broad Creek to accommodate additional foot traffic. While the initial proposed location was farther east, it makes more sense to locate such a bridge where the most commercial and residential activity is envisioned.

Very preliminary discussions with DelDOT indicate this may be a viable project for the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP). TAP also funds recreational trails, which are planned for The Ramble redevelopment project, and Safe Routes to Schools, which also are discussed in this section.

Given the possibilities of TAP and the goals for downtown Laurel, town leaders would like to pursue discussions with DelDOT.

### Replacement of bridges over Broad Creek

DelDOT's six-year Capital Transportation Program (Fiscal Years 2017-2022) call for the replacement of three bridges over Broad Creek in downtown Laurel:

- **Bridge 3-161: Poplar Street.** General reconditioning (painting) of bridge. Start construction in fall of 2018. Work includes painting the existing steel and repairs to the pier and abutment to fix the bridge permanently. This bridge ranks 68th out of 1,625 bridges on the 2016 DelDOT Bridge Deficiency List.
- **Bridge 3-152: North Central Avenue.** Replacement of superstructure (beams). Start construction in fall of 2018. The bridge is on the primary entry route into downtown Laurel and is currently posted for 13 tons. This bridge is ranked 88th on the 2016 DelDOT Bridge Deficiency List (out of 1,625 total bridges) and is considered structurally deficient.

According to DelDOT, "this bridge needs to be capable of safely carrying all Delaware legal loads including fire and rescue." Work will include the replacement of the main steel superstructure with concrete beams with a concrete

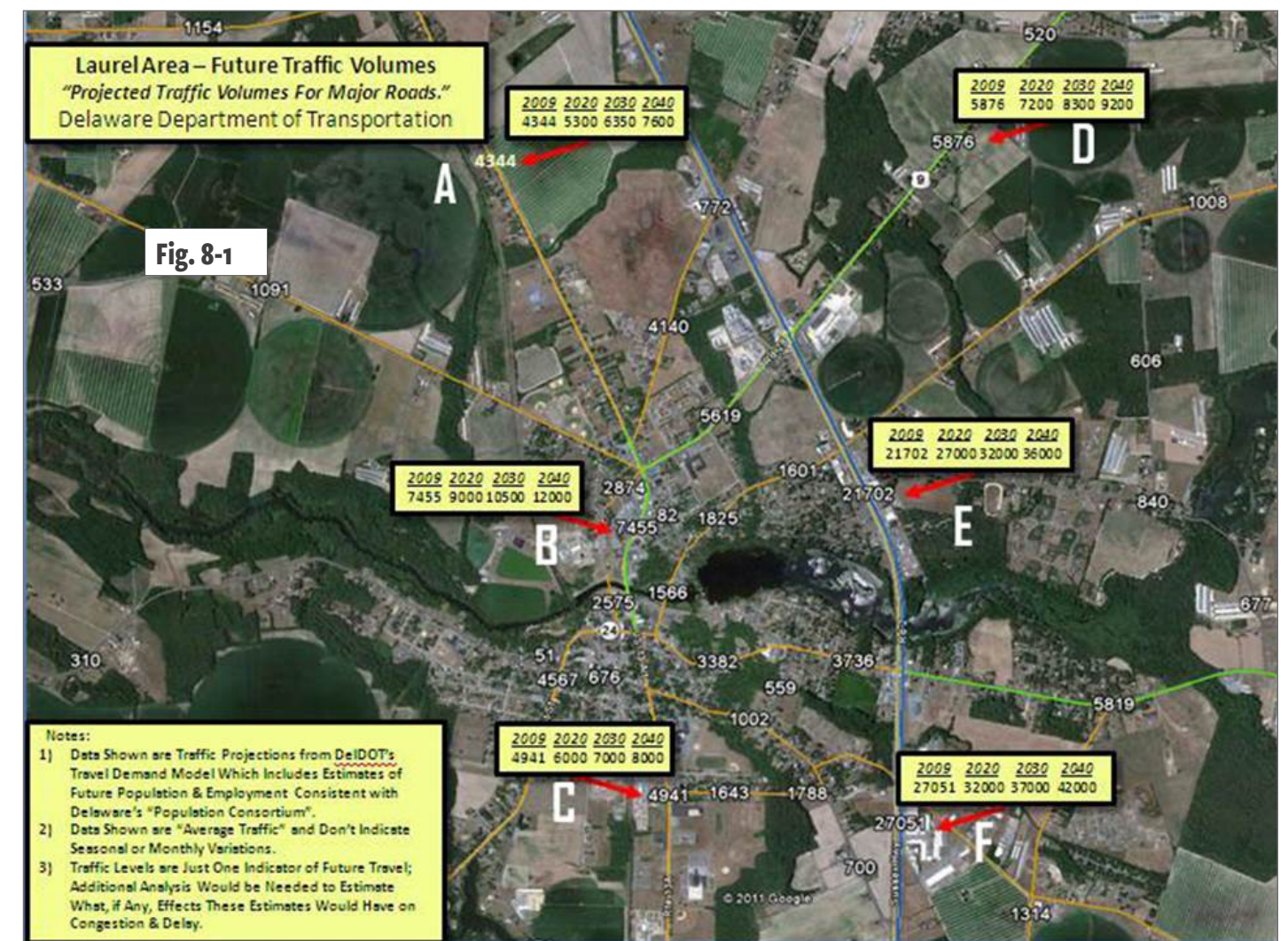
deck. The new beams will sit on new abutments constructed behind the existing abutments. The existing counterweight and steel girders will remain in place to maintain the bridge's historic character.

- **Bridge 3-162: Delaware Avenue.** Replacement of superstructure (beams) and possibly scour countermeasures. Start construction in spring/summer of 2019. Deterioration of the existing prestressed beams has caused the bridge to become structurally deficient. Replacement will include bearings, pre-stressed beams, barriers, sidewalks and wearing surfaces.

Additional rehabilitation work will be performed on the substructure to seal cracks, repair spalls (flaking off), and clean, patch and paint existing concrete surfaces. Minor reconstruction of the approach slabs and roadway also will be performed. This bridge ranks 174th on the 2016 DelDOT Bridge Deficiency List.

*Below, projected traffic volumes for major roads in Laurel are provided by DelDOT.*

*Truck traffic in the downtown area is estimated at 6.45 percent.*





The bridges will be closed during construction, although not at the same time. Work is scheduled to begin on the first two in the fall of 2017. Work on the Delaware Avenue bridge will begin in the spring/summer of 2019. Project cost estimate for the first two bridges is \$4.6 million. The total cost for the Delaware Avenue bridge is \$640,000.

Town leaders would like to ensure that the bridges’ design fits in with the historical character of the area.

Truck traffic in downtown Laurel

East-west truck traffic on Del. 24 through Laurel’s downtown has concerned residents and town leaders for more than 20 years. Trucks negotiate Laurel’s relatively narrow east-west main corridor, Market Street, and create congestion and traffic hazards. Preservation-minded residents are concerned about the impact on Laurel’s historic buildings.

The town notes that north-south truck traffic does not pose the same concern or impact, but the east-west through traffic volume is greater because Del. 24 is a principal route to Cambridge, Md., and other points on the Eastern Shore and farther west.

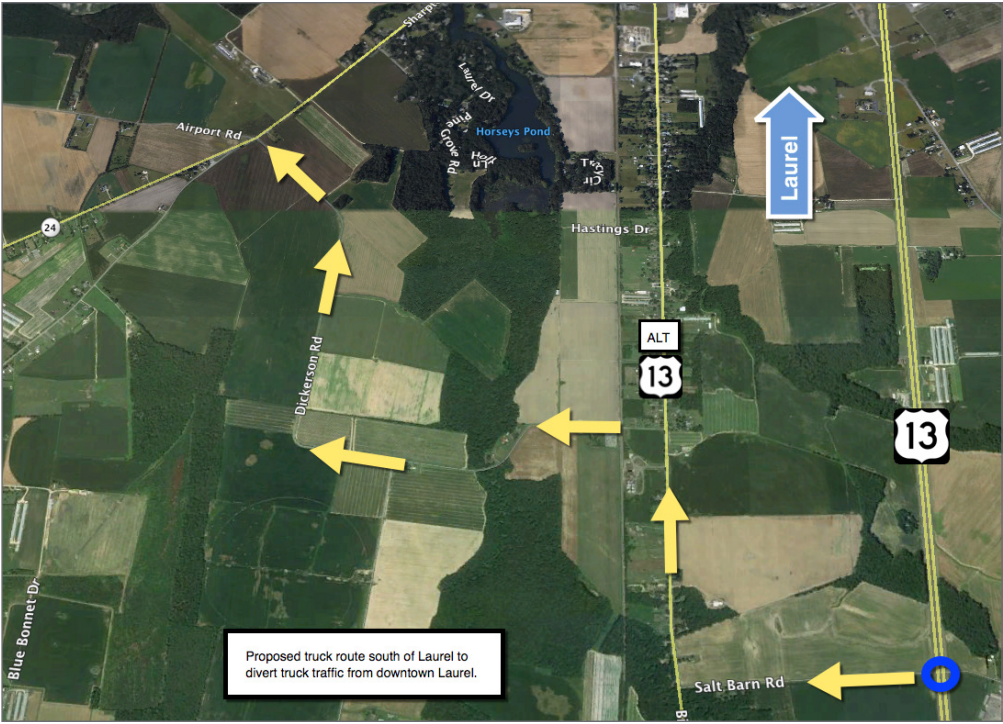
The town has suggested and discussed with DelDOT a proposed truck route (see Fig. 8-2) to the south of Laurel: Salt Barn Road from US 13 west to Alternate 13, then north to Dickerson Road to intersect with Del. 24 on the west side of town near the Laurel airport.

If Laurel chooses to focus on its Historic Core Corridor of Market Street and Central Avenue (See Section 3, Community Design), limiting heavy vehicle traffic along Del. 24/Market Street will become even more important to preservation of Laurel’s community character and making downtown Laurel more livable, safe and walkable.

Corridor preservation

In 1996, the General Assembly passed legislation enabling the Delaware Department of Transportation to develop a program protecting corridors that serve “predominantly statewide and/or regional travel” in the State. US 13 from Camden to Laurel is one of those corridors.

According to the State Strategies for Policy and Spending, which guides state investment in infrastructure such as roads, Laurel is either within Level 1 (Community) or Level 2 (Developing). DelDOT will concentrate its investment in Community Areas and Developing Areas by planning, designing, and constructing transportation improvement projects that maintain the capacity of the corridor. To maintain the free flow of traffic, in addition to building new roads or maintaining bridges and other infrastructure as necessary, projects may involve fairly large improvements such as elevating a roadway to eliminate cross-traffic from a busy, often accident-prone intersection.



**Fig. 8-2**  
Town leaders have long sought a truck route that diverts heavy trucks from Market Street (Del. 24). This preferred route is south of the town.

Other examples of Community / Developing Area type improvements are installing sound barriers, lighting, and additional lanes to an already limited access road. As development is proposed along this corridor in Laurel, traffic impact studies will predict trip generation and whether the new development will need to contribute to the construction of planned service roads or set aside land for future construction.

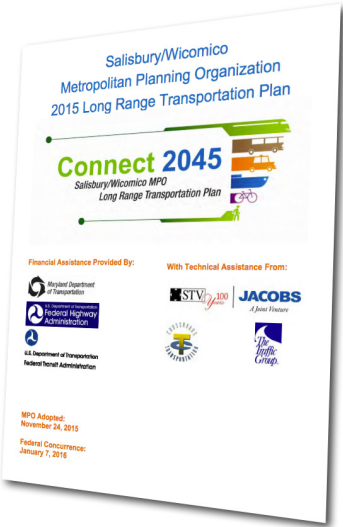
Other transportation improvements

Intersection improvements in Laurel have included the “channelization” of US 13 and Georgetown Road (US 9). The intersection was “channelized” to provide deceleration lanes and safer turning lanes. Entrances to businesses are set far back from the highway intersection.

In 2008, DelDOT completed comprehensive intersection improvements at the “Five Points” intersection—the meeting point of Georgetown Road, Route 13A (North Central Avenue), North Poplar Street, and Woodland Ferry Road—at the northern gateway into the main section of Town. These improvements included reorientation of the intersection, the addition of pedestrian signals, and the installation of faux-brick crosswalks.

Salisbury/Wicomico Metropolitan Planning Organization

After the 2010 Census, several western Sussex towns including Laurel and Seaford were included in an expanded designated urbanized area called the Salisbury, Maryland-Delaware Urbanized Area (see Fig. 8-3). The population of this area is just under 100,000.

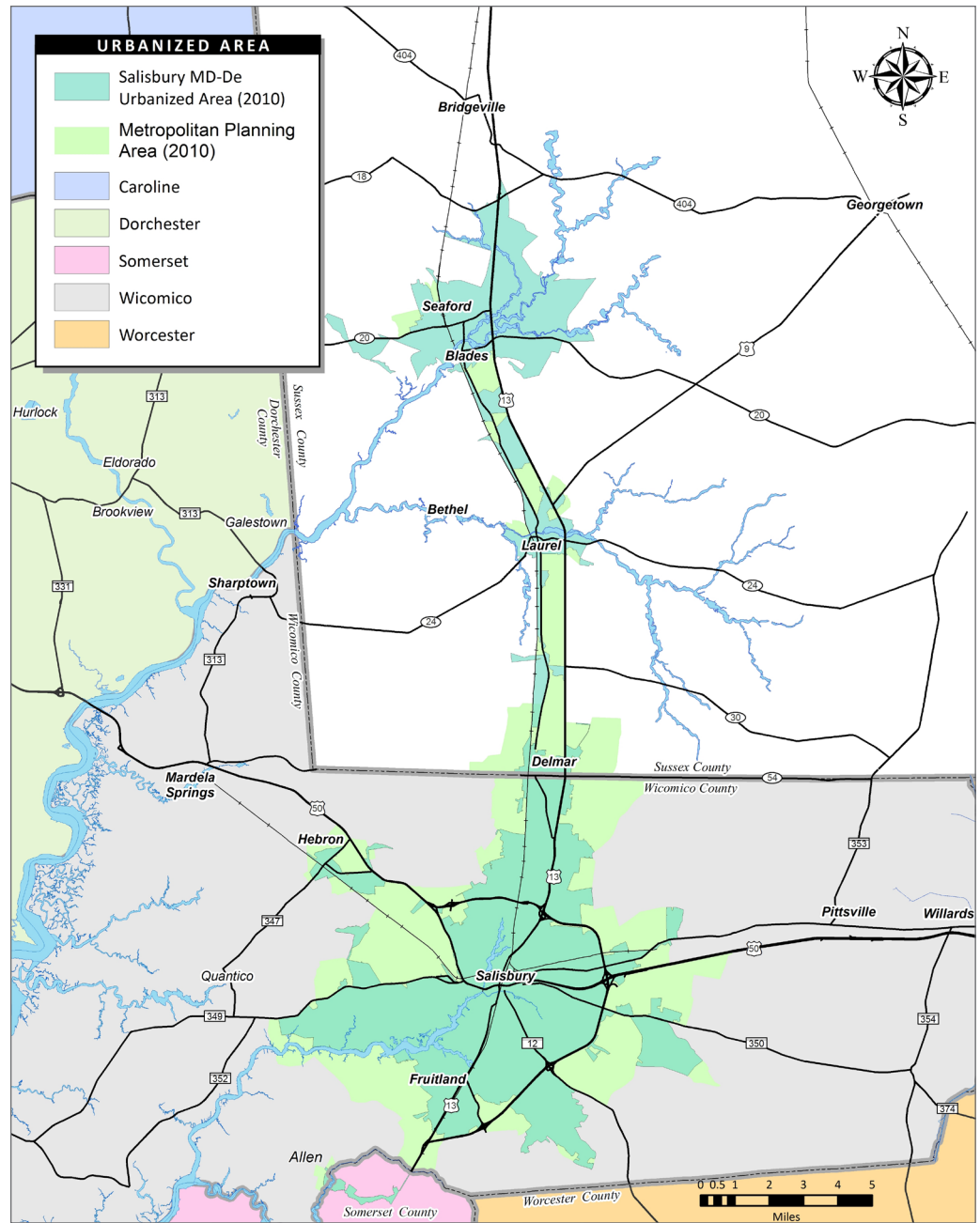


Click on report cover to view the Salisbury/Wicomico Metropolitan Planning Organization’s 45-year plan.



**Fig. 8-3**

Laurel, Blades and Seaford became part of the Salisbury, Md.-Delaware urbanized area after the 2010 Census. It stretches north to the intersection of US 13 and Del. 18/404. Population is about 98,000.



That change has many implications for the town that could be perceived positively or negatively. The designation puts Seaford and Laurel, along with Delmar, into the Salisbury/Wicomico Metropolitan Planning Organization, where Maryland and Salisbury issues dominate. An MPO is a federally designated organization that prioritizes federally funded projects for the region. Theoretically, if the MPO for a variety of reasons does not highly rank or prioritize a project, it does not receive federal funds.

The Salisbury/Wicomico Metropolitan Planning Council consists of 12 members, of which nine are from Maryland. One is from DelDOT, one is from Sussex County, and one is from Seaford. On the MPO's Technical Advisory Committee, Laurel shares a rotating appointment with Seaford and Blades. The TAC reviews and recommends revisions to the

transportation planning activities and studies, data collection, forecasting and modeling, and the core work plans of the MPO.

The potential positive is an MPO could provide funding for transportation-related studies that could provide useful information to and benefit the Town of Laurel. Seeking assistance with a bicycle/pedestrian master plan is one appropriate study topic.

### Transit in Laurel

During the week, DART Route 212 picks up passengers hourly at many stops throughout Laurel. The route goes north on US 13 through Seaford, then to Bridgeville State Service Center, the Del, 18/404 interchange opposite Food Lion, Delaware Tech at the Higher Education Building, and the Georgetown Transit Hub.

From Laurel the route goes south to Woodlawn Avenue at State Line Road in Delmar. On weekdays, connections may be made to Shore Transit's bus Route S192. The stop is at Rite-Aid across from Faith Baptist Church; passengers can then transfer to other Route/s operated by Shore Transit to access locations in/around Salisbury.

Ridership data provided by DART indicate an average weekday ridership of 73 (on/off) for Route 212 at the 20 Laurel-area stops, with the busiest stop being Central Avenue and Market Street.

### Bicycle/Pedestrian Plans

DelDOT is beginning work on a new statewide bicycle plan. The state is moving away from the current bike-route system—which includes Route 3 through Laurel and Route 6 between Georgetown and Laurel—toward inclusion of bikeways that allow cyclists of all skill levels to access the system and the advanced cyclists with the skills and experience to navigate a larger network.

In preparation, the agency has evaluated its system as well as the local street system to determine where low-stress streets exist. GIS data and traffic data will be used to determine this network. Local governments and citizens will need to evaluate the mapping and help determine if the data are correct. From this map, DelDOT can start to develop low-stress networks; low-stress streets are mostly those under municipal control. A high percentage of state roads are high stress (higher volumes and high speed).

In addition to DelDOT's work, the Salisbury/Wicomico Municipal Planning Council mentioned earlier is contemplating a regional bicycle network plan for southwestern Sussex County. Laurel would like to see a coordinated effort to develop such a plan. Bicyclists are drawn to the area with events such as the annual Broad Creek Bike and Brew, which takes cyclists to Trap Pond and Delmar, and over the Nanticoke River on



the Sharptown Bridge and Woodland Ferry. Such a plan could help the town promote its nature and heritage tourism strategy.

Safe Routes to Schools

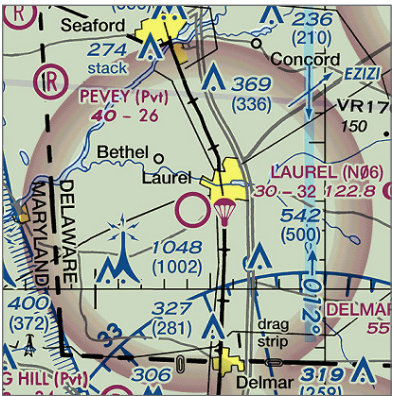
By 2018, all Laurel schools will be consolidated in one section of town along South Central Avenue. All of the district’s schools are within the town limits. With the right champion(s) and community commitment, Laurel has the opportunity to launch a successful Safe Routes to Schools program. Elementary and middle schools can receive funding to encourage students to walk or ride their bicycles to school, which can improve children’s health, reduce obesity, and build lifetime habits of outdoor exercise.

For example, Smyrna received \$523,000 for new sidewalks, crosswalks and curb construction, plus education programs at the three schools. The focus is on improving the safety of students who regularly walk or ride bicycles to school. More information about this community program is available on DelDOT’s website.

Laurel airport

While not in the town limits, the privately owned Laurel Airport (No6) maintains a 3,175-foot-long turf runway and is the site of significant skydiving activities in all but the winter months. According to [airnav.com](http://airnav.com), the airport average 27 operations per day, with 14 aircraft based on the field. Of the traffic, 81 percent is local general aviation; 19 percent is transient general aviation. The airport opened in 1946.

Linking with the airport and its skydiving operations have been discussed in the context of Laurel’s nature and heritage tourism strategy.



Laurel’s airport as depicted on the FAA sectional chart.

NANTICOKE HERITAGE BYWAY

Laurel is a “Discovery Zone” along the Nanticoke Heritage Byway (Fig. 8-4), which runs through Laurel to Trap Pond State Park. The Nanticoke Scenic Byway is one of six designated scenic byways in Delaware and also includes the Woodland Ferry, Phillips Landing, Bethel, Blades, Seafors and Concord.

A scenic byway is a transportation route that is adjacent to, or travels through an area that has particular intrinsic scenic, historic, natural, cultural, recreational or archeological qualities. It is a road corridor that offers an alternative travel route to major highways, while telling a story about Delaware’s heritage, recreational activities or beauty. It is a route that is managed in order to protect its special intrinsic qualities and to encourage appreciation and/or development of tourism and recreational resources.

The [Nanticoke Heritage Byway Corridor Management Plan](#) details plans to manage, protect, provide signage, market and otherwise promote this resource. The plan describes points of interest in and around Laurel including Chipman’s Mill; DuPont Factory Workers’ Homes; Historic Laurel; Laurel Heritage Museum; Old Christ Church; Ross Point School; Spring Garden; St. Philip’s Protestant Episcopal Church; and Trap Pond State Park.

In 2016, Town Council adopted a [nature and heritage tourism plan](#) based on the report, “Laurel, Delaware: Base Camp to Nanticoke Country,” prepared by Conservation Community Consultants. This thorough assessment of Laurel’s potential to market itself as a nature and heritage tourism gateway, or “base camp,” mentions the Byway and many of the tourism assets featured in the Byway management plan.

Laurel does not have to reinvent the wheel to launch itself as an attractive jumping-off point for visitors interested in history, scenic beauty, birding, paddling and other outdoor pursuits; much of the groundwork already has been laid. The town’s guiding principles are in sync with the aspirations of the Nanticoke Heritage Byway.



Click on the report cover to view the Nanticoke Heritage Byway Plan, which contains a great deal of information about Laurel and its surrounding area.

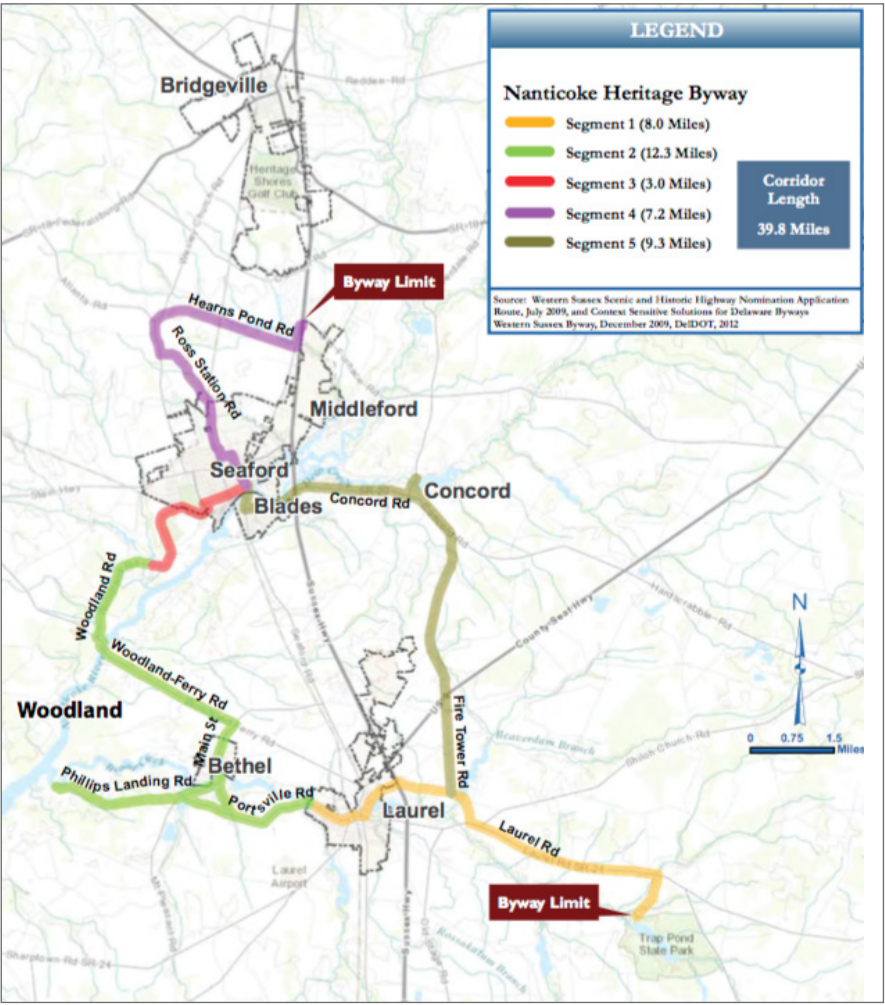


Fig. 8-4

The Nanticoke Heritage Byway is approximately 40 miles long and includes several scenic and historic sites, including a segment through Laurel.





# Infrastructure and community facilities

9

WATER AND WASTEWATER: ROOM TO GROW

As described in the Environmental Sustainability section (pages 62-63), Laurel has invested heavily in and is expanding its wastewater treatment plant. The \$11 million upgrade to Enhanced Nutrient Removal (ENR) technology went on line in 2008. It was (and still is) the first treatment plant in Delaware to meet the more stringent water quality requirements of the Chesapeake Watershed Implementation Plan.

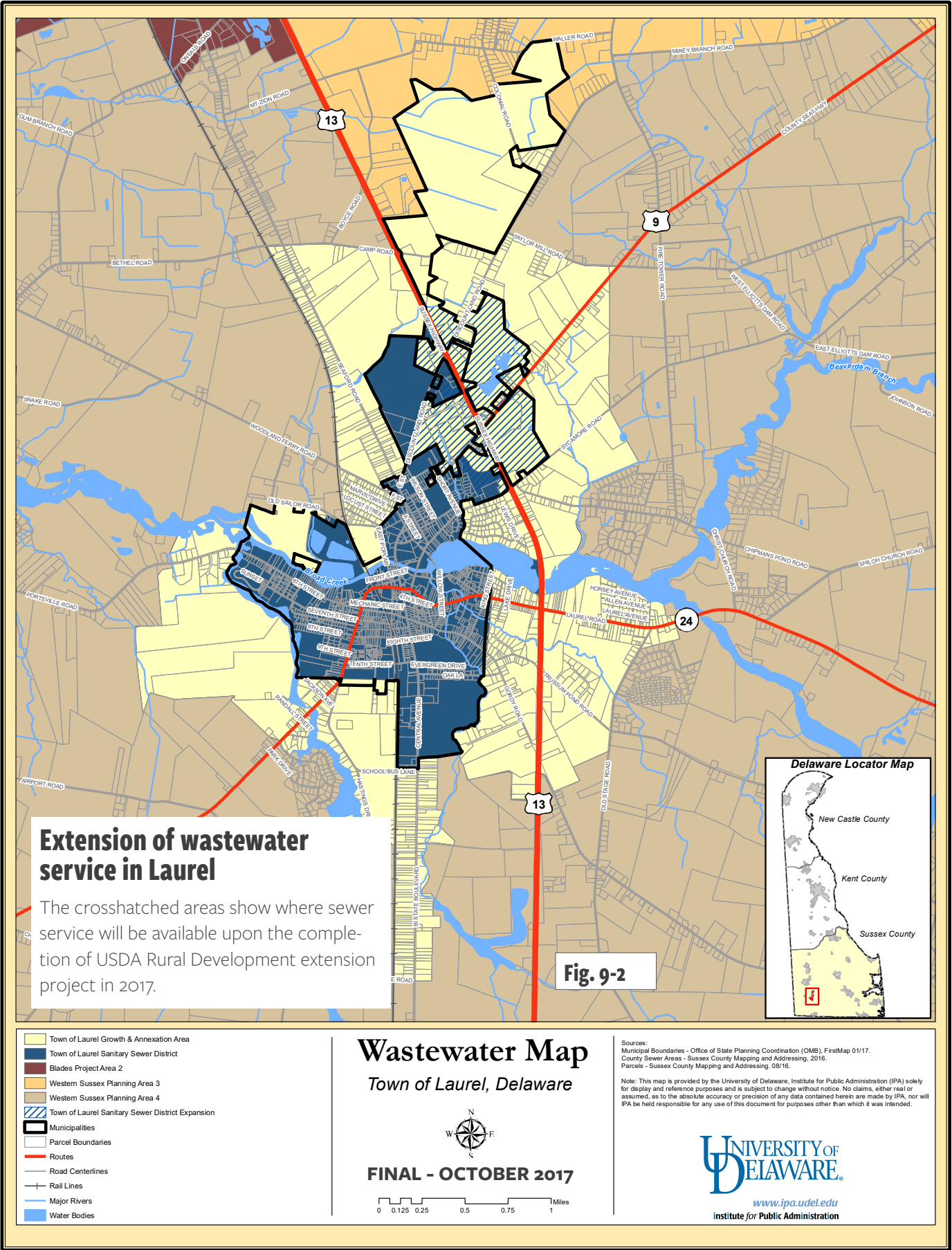
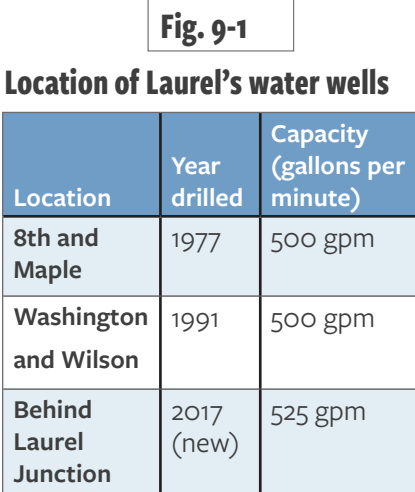
The plant’s current design flow is 700,000 gallons per day, and peak flow is 800,000 gallons per day, according to a Delaware Statewide Assessment of Wastewater Facilities completed in 2012. The plant is currently operating at about 350,000 gallons per day, and town officials estimate that the plant will serve Laurel for at least another 20 years. While the DNREC assessment projected an anticipated flow in 2020 of 1 million gallons per day, a large planned mixed-use development at the north end of town never materialized.

In 2010, the town hired GMB to design an extension of sewer and water services to the intersections of US 13/ US 9 and US 13/Sussex 468 for commercial and residential properties within or surrounding the existing town corporate boundaries. The project, funded by US Department of Agriculture Rural Development, was divided into two phases. Phase 1 design was completed in May 2013 and construction was completed in late 2014. Phase 2 design was completed in April 2015 and bid in October 2015.

When completed, the \$12 million project will extend sewer service to 62 properties, removing the equivalent of 138 EDUs from onsite septic systems, according to the USDA.

The Laurel Highway Corridor Water and Sewer Extension-Phase 2 project consisted of a new 525 gallons-per-minute (gpm) production well and a 1,000-gpm Water Treatment Facility. In addition, the town’s water distribution and gravity sewer collection system was extended to the US 13/ Discount Land Road intersection to provide economic growth to the town. The Water Treatment Facility (WTF) was designed for iron removal for a system design flow of 1,000 gpm utilizing three 10-foot diameter pressure filters.

In addition, the chemical feed system included Sodium Hypochlorite for disinfection, Sodium Hydroxide for pH adjustment, and Calciques—a corrosion inhibitor. Water will be introduced to the new WTF via a new production well that will draw from a





confined aquifer, as it will be less susceptible to nitrate contamination, and have a 12-inch diameter casing along with a 50 Hp submersible pump.

The gravity collection system was extended to the outer boundaries of the corporate limit in the US 13 / Discount Land Road area. An existing pump station was upgraded to include new pumps, controls, valve vault, and a Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) computer system. The water distribution system was extended to this same intersection consisting of 16-, 12-, and 10-inch water mains.

### THREE NEW SCHOOLS FOR LAUREL

In 2010, Laurel School District voters narrowly approved, by 14 votes, a proposal to:

- Build a new 1,400-student high school and middle school for \$70.2 million;
- Build a new 1,200-student elementary school for \$40.2 million;
- Perform engineering, abatement, demolition and site restoration of North Laurel Elementary School for \$3.4 million; and
- Perform planning, abatement, engineering and “selective demolition” of the existing middle school and “selective renovation” of the remaining facilities for \$3.2 million.

A second question, to build new athletic facilities at a cost of \$3.6 million, failed. However, enough money was available in the district’s construction budget to fund new athletic fields for the middle and high schools; language was included in the state capital improvements bill (Bond Bill) to allow the construction of the fields in spite of the referendum result.

Local opposition from preservationists and alumni to the demolition of the 1921 middle school, one of the historic schools built throughout the state by Pierre S. du Pont, prompted former Sen. Robert Venables to also include language in the Bond Bill that called for the preservation and renovation of the school. That language drew concern from school district officials, who said it would take \$2.4 million from the North Laurel Elementary School project and \$3.2 million from the middle school-high school project.

The district was able to secure agreement to allocate \$1.5 million to preserve and protect the exterior of the building. However, interior renovations for any purpose are estimated at several million dollars; the state’s funding formula would not permit such a costly renovation for an educational or administrative purpose. Because of the prohibitive up-front costs to renovate the building and the need for a detailed feasibility study, it is outside the scope of this plan to propose a new use for this building.



*The former Laurel Middle School has been mothballed with no specific plans for renovation.*

The new elementary school will open for the 2018-19 school year. North Laurel will be repurposed as an alternative school, as the district now pays tuition to Woodbridge School District to accept students with discipline problems. The other existing elementary school, Paul Laurence Dunbar, is a historic African-American school also built by Pierre S. du Pont. The school district is willing to gift that school to the town or non-profit entity for transformation into a police station and/or community center.

### OTHER COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Other facilities important to Laurel include:

- **Parks.** As mentioned elsewhere, Laurel has several parks and recreational facilities in the Broad Creek-business district area. There is playground equipment and a DNREC-maintained boat ramp in Roger Fisher Park on the west end; a DNREC-maintained fishing pier on Records Pond; and several community parks in between: Venables Park and Janosik Park along the creek and Market Square Park along Market Street.
- **Laurel Volunteer Fire Company.** The main fire hall at 205 W. 10th Street was built in 1977-78; Sycamore Station, opened in 2012 and is a 5,000-square-foot, two-bay station located at 29022 Fire Tower Road.
- **Laurel Public Library.** The current two-story building was completed in 2006. The library’s Delaware Room, local history collection and facilities for genealogical research are located upstairs. Expanded areas for teens and children allow plenty of space for activities and house a collection carefully selected to meet young people’s needs as their interests grow and change. There are 12 public computers with Internet access and eight other computers throughout the library. Equipped with a kitchen and separate rest room facilities, the Mary Wootten Carpenter Community Room accommodates educational and cultural programs.
- **Laurel Town Hall.** The building at 201 Mechanic St. is home to Town Council, Town Administration, Public Works, Code Enforcement, Alderman’s Court and the police department.
- **Laurel Train Station.** The former train station behind Town Hall now houses the Laurel Chamber of Commerce and the Laurel Heritage Museum. The museum features an extensive collection of historical documents and objects from the collections of the Laurel Historical Society and the Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs. The key element of the museum is the one-of-a-kind Waller Photographic Collection.
- **Delaware State Service Center.** The building at 31039 Poplar St. offers client services administered by Department of Health and Social Services including Emergency Assistance Service, Food Closet, Kinship Care, Low-Income Home Energy Assistance, child care, food stamps and Medicaid.



*The Laurel Heritage Museum is home to historic photographs from the former Waller Studio.*



# Land use and annexation 10

## ANNEXATION SHOULD FOCUS ON INFILL ALONG US 13

Within its current, fragmented boundaries, Laurel has room to grow without expanding further outward in the near future. According to DNREC, there are 611 acres of cropland within the town limits (see Fig. 10-1). Laurel has designated a short-term annexation area for which a buildout scenario has been completed (see pages 18-19), and that buildout likely would take many years. In addition, this plan has included a long-term annexation area from the previous comprehensive plan.

Within the short-term annexation area, but outside current town limits, there are an estimated 589 individual septic systems, according to data provided by DNREC. There are only a handful of septic systems remaining within town limits. Annexation of these areas would be problematic in terms of the costs of extending water and wastewater services and compliance with Nanticoke/Chesapeake water quality standards.

The annexation areas (see map on page 93) include farms that are in 10-year voluntary Agricultural Preservation Districts or the permanent Agricultural Easement program. Buildout around these farms should be adequately planned and buffered so that these farmers' intent to maintain viable agricultural operations is respected and protected.

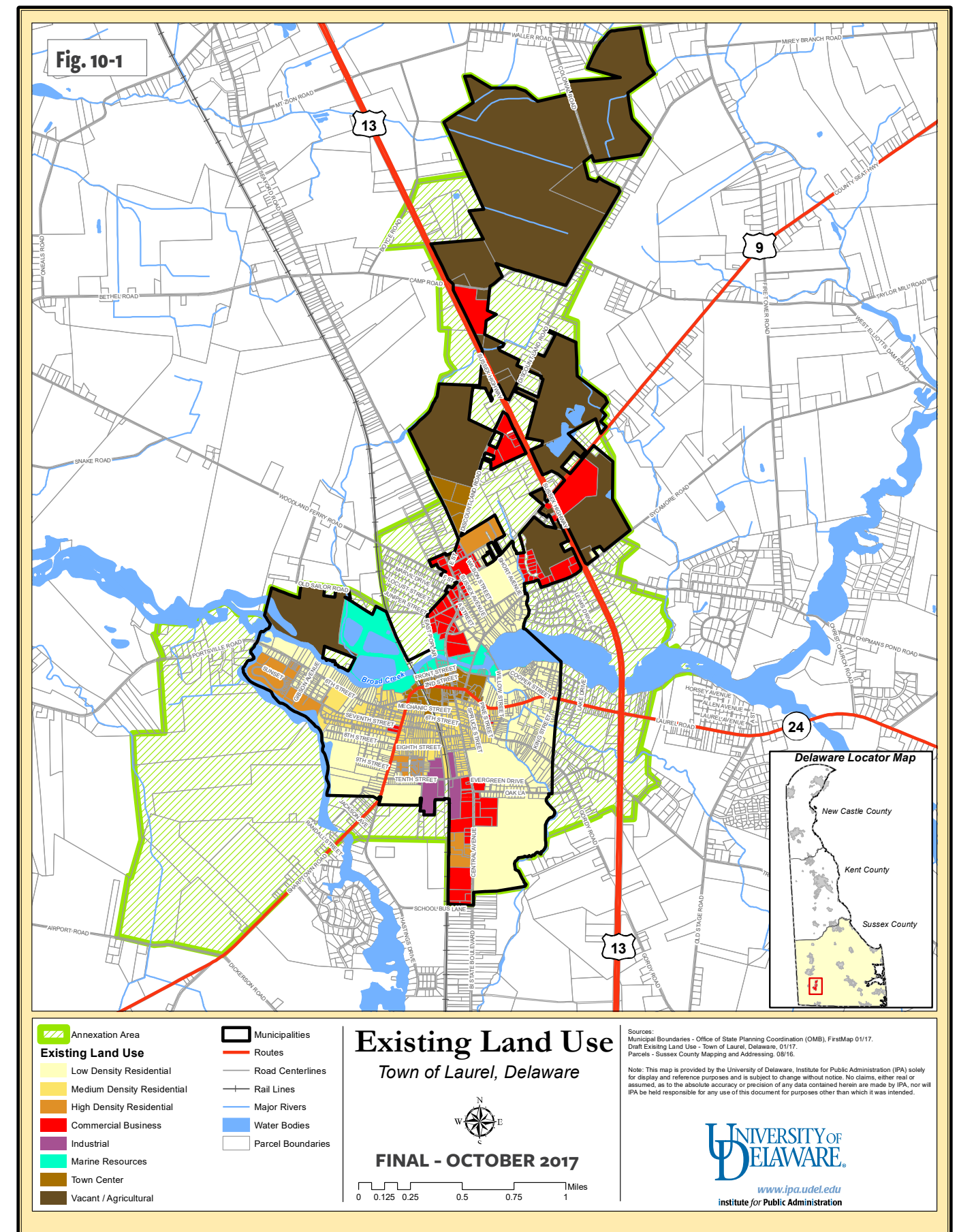
Laurel's wastewater treatment plant is operating at less than half its capacity. Water and wastewater expansions now make several large parcels along US 13 viable candidates for commercial development (see map on page 87).

Observing Laurel's municipal boundaries, the most effective land use and annexation strategy would be to fill in the blank spots on the map along US 13 and develop existing large parcels already within town limits. The current patchwork could invite confusion about jurisdiction and provision of town services, tax rates, and where infrastructure is and isn't available.

As mentioned in Chapter 6, Economic Development, the town should identify annexation targets along US 13 and consider developing appropriate incentives that would encourage their owners to become part of the town. Incentives could include reduction in sewer and water impact or connection fees or actual rates; in the case of vacant properties that could be developed, an incentive could be waiver of property taxes until a development proposal is approved.

Annexations, as well as any rezoning, should be proactive and planned, rather than reactive to a developer seeking an opportunity that the town may not be prepared for, or which may not be compatible with the guiding principles of this plan. Especial-

The most effective land use and annexation strategy would be to fill in the blank spots on the map along US 13 and develop existing large parcels already within town limits.





ly in the case of residential or mixed-use development, standards for annexation (or rezoning) should include requirements for integration with the town and a “town-like” design—rather than allowing an isolated enclave separate from the rest of Laurel.

Standards should be consistent, transparent and legally defensible so that the town can confidently say no to an inappropriate development proposal.

### Need for zoning code update and mixed-use category

After the release of the first draft of this plan, the town concluded that an overall revision of its zoning code was necessary to ensure responsible growth that reflects Laurel’s character and promotes economic development. Besides this plan’s specific recommendations to review and revise the Town-Center and Marine-Resources zoning categories, the town recognized the need to create a new Mixed-Use Zoning category that would permit a mix of residential and businesses uses beyond the town center. Such a category would replace the town’s Large Parcel Overlay District and allow for “town-like” three-dimensional pedestrian-oriented development.

According to *Placemakers*, such communities “layer compatible land uses, public amenities, and utilities together at various scales and intensities. This variety of uses allows for people to live, work, play and shop in one place, which then becomes a destination for people from other neighborhoods.”

### Review zoning within Downtown Development District

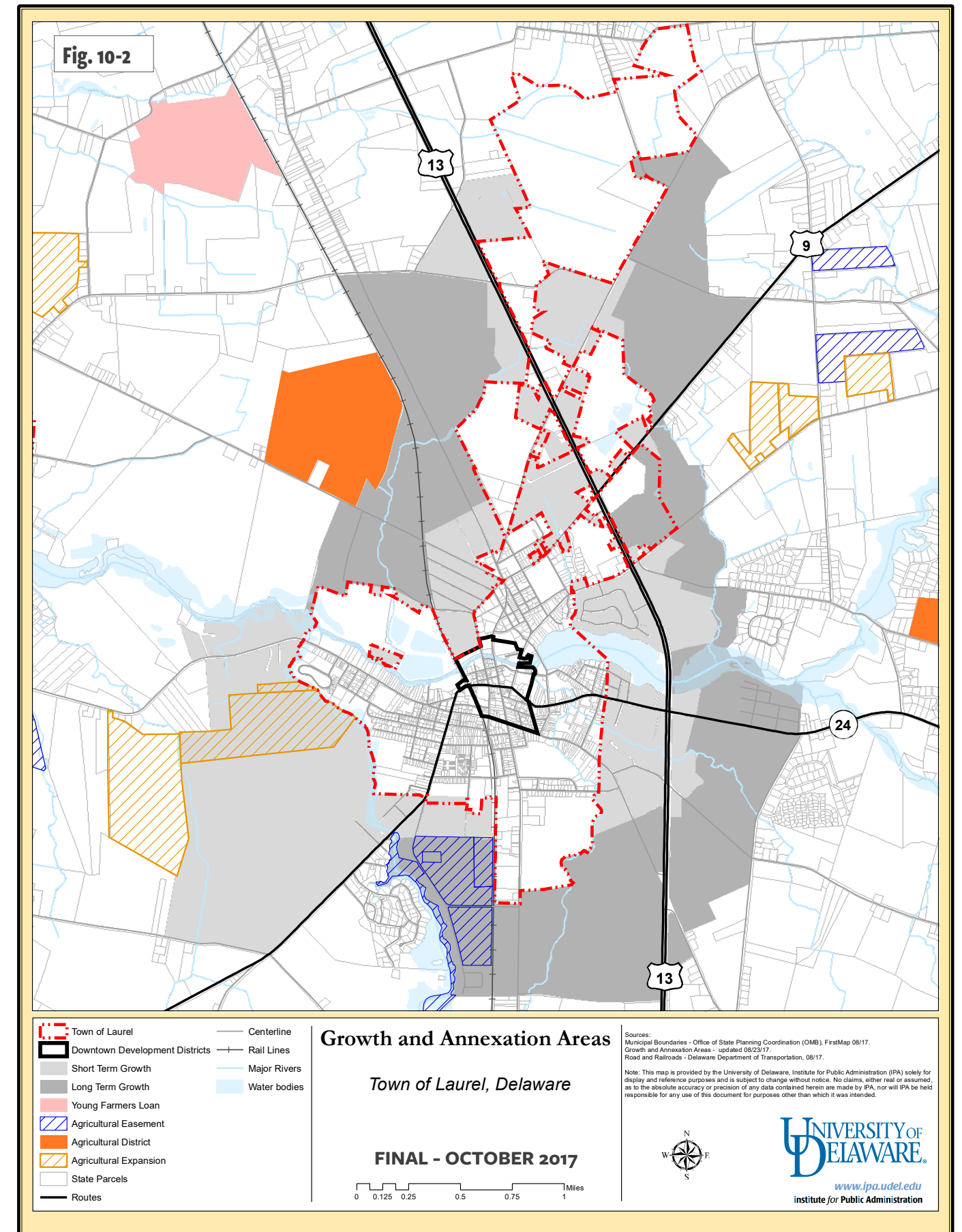
The original plan draft discussed a Historic Core Corridor Overlay limited to Market Street and Central Avenue within the Downtown Development District. An overlay can be legally problematic; subsequent discussion with a land-use attorney, town officials and the Office of State Planning Coordination have resulted in a recommendation to review zoning throughout the Downtown Development District. The Town should consider allowing appropriate low-impact businesses that would reuse deteriorating historic properties, as well as encourage accessory dwelling units of “granny flats.”. Appropriate changes could allow more flexibility in uses and result in more people living and working in Laurel’s core.

This plan still endorses the concept of focusing on the Market Street-Central Avenue corridor, especially within the Downtown Development District, to address vacant and unsightly properties, improve walkability, and promote economic development.

### Additional residential opportunities

Laurel’s population skews very young, with a median age of 27.7. The largest age cohort is 0-4 years, representing 14.5 percent of the town’s population, according to the US Census 2010-2014 American Community Survey. The town should consider the

Even outside Laurel’s center, a new “mixed-use” zoning category would promote viable, walkable neighborhoods that feel like they belong to a town.









## The essence of Laurel

Overlapping in the center of Laurel are the Downtown Development District with its significant incentives for rehabilitation of residential and commercial properties; Laurel's Historic District; the Old Town neighborhood that is a revitalization target; Market Street and the library with its vision for an arts and entertainment district; the many parks, fishing area, boat ramp and kayak launch; and The Ramble, which is on the verge of coming to life along the tree-lined Broad Creek waterfront.

This is the essence of Laurel, and there is already a synergy of partnerships, excitement, accomplishment, and shared goals and vision at work to reimagine what it can be. As that happens, success will spread throughout the town.

## Future land use designations

**Mixed use.** In the context of the Future Land Use map and annexation areas, “mixed use” does not necessarily refer to a specific zoning category. Because the short- and long-term annexation areas represents the town’s best estimate for the next 10 to 50 years, “mixed use” can mean residential or commercial, or both. It does not mean industrial.

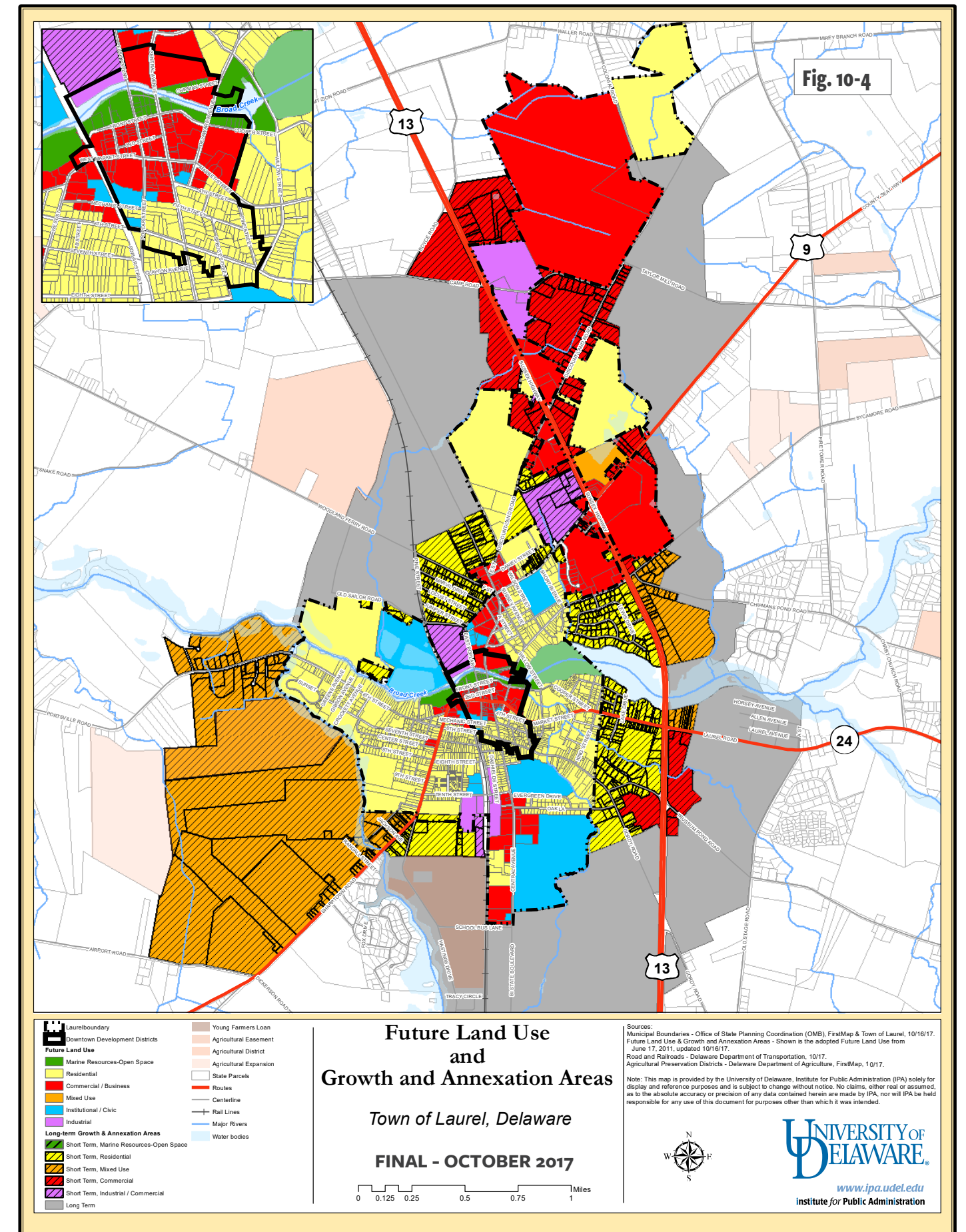
In Laurel’s Downtown Development District, “mixed use” refers to Town-Center zoning, which seeks to achieve a historic, diverse, walkable, commercially viable and livable downtown.

All long-term annexation areas (gray) are designated mixed use in the Future Land Use plan. Over the next 10 years, as the time for updating its comprehensive plan approaches, Laurel will have the opportunity to be more specific about future land uses in these annexation areas.

**Marine Resources-Open Space.** The ribbon of green along Laurel’s waterfront represents areas where development is planned in a manner that recognizes the value of Broad Creek and does not exacerbate flooding, significantly diminish the tree canopy, or degrade water quality. Much of this property is parkland, almost all is owned by either the town or the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation, and there are conservation easements along the creek bank. The Ramble redevelopment initiative is included within this category.

**Agricultural districts/eased lands.** Several parcels within Laurel’s annexation areas are in Delaware’s voluntary 10-year Agricultural Preservation District program or have permanent easements. Development in and around these farms should be buffered and designed in a way that does not jeopardize the viability of farming operations or the farmer’s property rights.

Delaware Code Title 3, §914 requires the easement to run with the land, no matter who owns it, for at least 25 years. After then, the termination process is onerous. The Agricultural Lands Preservation Foundation must be repaid the difference between the fair market value and the agricultural value of the land, plus any tax benefit realized while the farm was preserved.





# Recommendations and implementation

11

**THESE RECOMMENDATIONS ARE ORDERED BY THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES DEVELOPED AND AGREED TO BY THE LAUREL PLAN ADVISORY TEAM IN JULY 2016. SOME OF THEM WILL BE REPEATED, AS THEY FALL UNDER MORE THAN ONE GUIDING PRINCIPLE. AN IMPLEMENTATION TIMETABLE IS SHOWN AT THE END OF THIS SECTION.**

*Under 22 Del. C. § 702, a Comprehensive Development Plan “shall be the basis for the development of zoning regulations” and has “the force of law [such that] no development shall be permitted except as consistent with the plan.”*

*It is understood that the recommendations and the maps in the Plan have the force of law. In crafting and refining the Plan, the Commission and Mayor and Council have developed policy and recommendations*

*that are reasonably likely to prove attainable. The Plan sets policies and recommends possible actions, but difficult implementation issues remain. Identification and prioritization of steps to implement the Plan and allocation of resources to that end, however, remain difficult and complex issues which the city and its citizens will consider over the ten-year period covered by the Plan.*

## **I. We will be a close-knit community that creates walkable streets, safe neighborhoods and attractive public places so that all our residents feel secure and confident about their town.**

- Adjust Town-Center zoning to eliminate barriers to mixed use and walkability and to facilitate new residential and commercial development. Review appropriate zoning for DDD.
- Explore the feasibility and costs of repurposing the historic Dunbar Elementary School.
- Consider a Safe Routes to Schools program pilot to encourage children to ride their bikes and walk to Laurel’s new school campus.
- Pursue sidewalk improvements with DelDOT and other funding sources, particularly in Old Town and along Market Street and Discountland Road.
- Pursue Transportation Alternatives Program funding with DelDOT for safe pedestrian alternative to Poplar Street bridge.

- Improve entrance and access to Roger Fisher Park, with assistance from DNREC, to improve visibility, security and usage.
- Continue placemaking events along Broad Creek, in parks and downtown to attract visitors to Laurel.
- Pursue funding for security measures such as lighting and cameras.
- With assistance from legislators, encourage DelDOT to divert truck traffic from Market Street with alternative route.
- Prepare updated zoning code that incorporates new mixed-use category and enhanced attention to town’s historic core and DDD, and rezone appropriately.

## **II. We will improve the appearance of Laurel’s homes, commercial buildings and properties to honor our history, build community pride and attract new residents and businesses.**

- Create a Historic Core Corridor Plan for Market Street and Central Avenue within the Downtown Development District that targets vacant and derelict properties, protects historic structures, improves walkability and encourages targeted businesses to take root and grow.
- Enact an ordinance that addresses long-term vacant properties and generates revenues for demolition, enforcement and/or reinvestment in downtown.
- Enact an ordinance that targets landlords who are chronic violators of town codes to ensure that residents have a reliably safe, clean place to live and that fines are not just a cost of doing business.
- Enact an ordinance that ensures more accountability from absentee landlords, especially those without a management presence near Laurel.
- Adopt a strategy for code and ordinance enforcement that addresses both rental properties and owner-occupied homes in chronic disrepair that threaten public health, safety and community cohesion.
- Create a Historic District Advisory Board to make recommendations to the Town about the preservation and rehabilitation of historic properties, particularly within the Historic Core Corridor..
- Seek funding for facade improvements as a match to Downtown Development Districts grants and incentives.
- To safeguard Laurel’s community character, develop basic design and landscaping standards for new residential and commercial construction and major rehab in Laurel’s Ramble area, Old Town and business district.
- Develop and adopt standards for the appearance of US 13 properties that are gateways into Laurel.

## **III. We will attract a strategic mix of new small businesses, entrepreneurs, small manufacturers and shopping that will provide quality employment for our citizens and meet community needs.**

- Identify and adopt incentives to encourage annexation along US 13 and fill in gaps so that town boundary is continuous, rational and transparent to potential developers.
- Plan and prepare for commercial (retail and non-retail) development along US 13 that may include a campus-style business or light manufacturing park.
- Implement Nature/Heritage Tourism strategy; work with LRC and Laurel Chamber to identify quick wins and ID parcels for brewpub-type establishment and outdoor outfitters.



*A group of travel writers and their local guides enjoy paddling on Broad Creek during a familiarization trip in September 2016.*





Aerial view of the Old Town neighborhood, which is a priority area for community improvement - home ownership, rehabilitation, mixed-use development, and commercial revitalization.

- d. Publish town codes in online, searchable format such as eCode 360.
- e. Ensure that development review and approval processes are transparent and well defined; review related fees.
- f. Identify a path to funding a position focused on community and economic development.
- g. Explore the feasibility of permitting, constructing and operating a small boat harbor on the north shore of Broad Creek.

**IV. We recognize Broad Creek as our greatest natural asset and a focal point for recreation, relaxation, nature tourism and sustainable waterfront development.**

- a. Adjust Marine Resources zone to make it more protective of the resource while still allowing development (e.g., tree canopy requirements, vegetated setbacks, low-impact stormwater infrastructure, flood zone, clustering).
- b. Adopt tree canopy ordinance or resolution.
- c. Incorporate DNREC recommendations regarding Town’s Source Water Protection ordinance.

- d. Adopt, as practicable, recommendations of Watershed Implementation Plan report that continue to protect water quality in Broad Creek.

**V. We will encourage home ownership and housing choices, via both restoration and new development compatible with Laurel’s community character, to attract new residents and raise the standard of living for all our citizens.**

- a. Continue to implement the Community Improvement, Rehabilitation and Homeownership program featured in Laurel’s Downtown Development District Plan, including the \$500,000 Strong Neighborhoods Housing Fund grant.
- b. Continue to secure funding through Neighborhood Buildings Blocks Fund to successfully implement many of these plan measures.
- c. To safeguard Laurel’s community character, develop basic design and landscaping standards for new residential and commercial construction and major rehab in Laurel’s Ramble area, Old Town and business district. (Repeat of II-h)

- d. Attract quality developer for planned pocket neighborhood of cottages (or other appropriate development) that are part of The Ramble, with design standards in place and net-zero impact on water quality.
- e. Complete Villas on Broad Creek with assistance from DDD grants and incentives.
- f. Replace Large Parcel Development Overlay in zoning code with Mixed-Use Zoning designation that encourages “town-like” development.
- g. Consider Accessory Dwelling Unit ordinance and permit short-term residential rentals such as AirBnb.

**VI. We value our downtown as the heart of Laurel’s identity, history and commerce and are committed to redeveloping it as our hub for economic growth, tourism and small-town living.**

- a. Pursue feasibility study for Library Director’s Arts District vision that would transform a core block of Market Street.
- b. Create a Historic Core Corridor Plan for Market Street and Central Avenue within the Downtown Development District that targets vacant and derelict properties, protects historic structures, improves walkability and encourages targeted businesses to take root and grow. (Repeat of II-a.)

- c. Enact an ordinance that addresses long-term vacant properties and generates revenues for demolition, enforcement and/or reinvestment in downtown. (Repeat of II-b)
- d. Seek funding for facade improvements as a match to Downtown Development Districts grants and incentives. (Repeat of II-g)
- e. Adopt a cohesive and differentiating townwide economic development strategy so that downtown Laurel is not competing with the U.S. 13 corridor for projects.
- f. Continue to support and seek a variety of funding for The Ramble redevelopment project, including the cottages, nature-based playground and commercial development.

**IMPLEMENTATION OF LAUREL’S COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

Recognizing that Laurel does not have the capacity or wherewithal to absorb and implement dozens of comprehensive, complicated and labor-intensive recommendations, this plan has attempted to limit recommendations and focus them according to the guiding principles developed and adopted in July 2016 by the Laurel Plan Advisory Team.

That does not mean that the recommendations are limited or incremental. If embraced, adopted and implemented in a systematic fashion, the plan will help Laurel change the course of its future.

To help develop and implement many of the recommendations within the plan, the town applied for a Neighborhood Building Blocks grant from the Delaware Economic Development Office. The grant would enable and jump start implementation of the plan, particularly in the areas that deal with blight, public safety, code enforcement and fostering economic development.

The matrices on the following pages lay out an implementation plan according to a post-adoption timeline: 0 to 6 months, 6 to 12 months, 12 to 18 months, and 18 months to 24 months.



Timeline for implementation of Laurel’s comprehensive plan

o to 6 months after adoption	Number	Comment
Review and adjust Town-Center zoning to ensure that it enables buildout of The Ramble vision	I-a	Review permitted uses, parking requirements, etc.
Continue placemaking events along Broad Creek, in parks and downtown to attract visitors to Laurel	I-g	Ongoing, consider community painting of mural on wall of Hispanic market
Vacant property ordinance	II-b	Review similar ordinances in Laurel, Smyrna and elsewhere
Landlord chronic violator ordinance	II-c	Conduct research, review other ordinances
Absentee landlord ordinance	II-d	Review similar ordinances in Snow Hill, Md., and elsewhere
Adopt an equalized strategy of code enforcement (owner-occupied and rentals)	II-e	Discussions with town leadership
Design and landscaping standards for new construction	II-h	Begin research and development of standards so that new mixed-use development will fit in with historic character of surroundings
Make DNREC recommendations re Sourcewater Protection and refine ordinance	IV-c	Per pre-PLUS comments
Continue to implement Community Improvement/Strong Neighborhoods efforts in DDD	V-a	LRC is funding this effort; partnering with Town, Habitat and Milford Housing
Secure funding through Neighborhood Building Blocks to successfully implement many plan measues	V-b	Application submitted to DEDO
Continue to support and seek variety of funding options for Ramble elements	VI-f	Ongoing

6 to 12 months after adoption	Number	Comment
Truck traffic diversion to alternate route	I-i	Begin working with DelDOT and legislators
Develop Historic Core Corridor plan	II-a	Proactively preserve Market Street and Central Avenue business and residential corridors
Create a Historic District Advisory Board	II-f	Companion to Historic Core Corridor Overlay
Seek funding for facade improvement program	II-g	Economic development initiative
Identify and adopt incentives to encourage annexation along US 13	III-a	Economic development initiative
Begin implementing Nature/Heritage Tourism strategy	III-c	Economic development initiative
Publish town codes online again, making them more accessible to citizens and developers	III-d	Economic development initiative
Ensure that development review and approval processes are well defined; review related fees	III-e	Economic development initiative
Attract quality developer for cottages within Ramble	V-d	Or other appropriate redevelopment
Pursue funding options for library Arts District vision	VI-a	Preliminary feasibility/planning study

12 to 18 months after adoption	Number	Comment
Explore feasibility and costs of repurposing Dunbar	I-b	Seek funds for planning/feasibility studies
Explore Safe Routes to Schools program	I-c	Needs champion(s) within school district and community
Pursue sidewalk improvements in Old Town, along Market Street, and along Discountland Road	I-d	Town, DelDOT, legislators
Pursue Transportation Alternatives Program funding for pedestrian alternative to Poplar Street bridge	I-e	This may become higher priority if cottages and playground proceed
Seek funding for security measures such as lighting and cameras	I-h	Town, legislators, DOJ
Prepare updated zoning code that incorporates mixed-use development and enhanced attention to town’s DDD and Historic Core Corridor, and rezone appropriately; rezone per state law.	I-j V-f	Rezoning within 18 months of adopting a comprehensive plan is a statutory requirement.
Develop and adopt standards for appearance of US 13 gateway properties into Laurel	II-i	Economic development initiative (attracts visitors and shoppers into town)
Complete Villas on Broad Creek	V-e	DDD incentives
Plan and prepare for commercial development (retail and non-retail) along US 13, possibly including a campus-tyle business park	III-b	Economic development initiative
Identify a path to funding a professional staff position focused on community and economic development	III-f	Requires sustainable revenue source
Review and adjust Marine-Resources zone to make it more protective of the resource while still permitting development	IV-a	Consistent with Watershed Implementation Plan report recommendations
Adopt tree canopy resolution or ordinance	IV-b	Consistent with Watershed Implementation Plan report recommendations
Consider Accessory Dwelling Unit ordinance and permit short-term residential rentals such as AirBnB	V-g	Research and present best practices
Adopt cohesive and townwide economic development strategy	VI-e	Brings together all elements under discussion re economic development

18-24 months after adoption	Number	Comment
Improve entrance and access to Roger Fisher Park	I-f	Coordination with DNREC, DelDOT, legislators and property owner
Explore feasibility of small boat harbor	III-g	Engineering feasibility, coordination with DNREC
Adopt, as practicable, additional recommendations of the Watershed Implementation plan report	IV-d	Depends on future course of DNREC and Chesapeake TMDL, including tracking of best management practices (BMPs) and available funding



# Intergovernmental outreach and acknowledgments 11

## COORDINATION WITH STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

A pre-PLUS meeting was conducted with state agencies on November 25, 2015. State comments and suggestions were offered, and most were incorporated into this plan. Representatives of multiple state agencies were consulted in the preparation of this plan. They include:

- **Office of State Planning Coordination.** Connie Holland, Dorothy Morris, David Edgell. The draft plan and key recommendations were reviewed with this office.
- **Department of Transportation.** Bill Brokenbrough, Anthony Aglio, Luis Rios Fontanez, Jason Hastings, Michael Hahn, Tom Felice, Jason Arndt, Catherine Smith, Tremica Cherry, Ann Gravatt, John Fiori
- **Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control.** Kevin Coyle, Doug Rambo, Ann Mundel, Susan Love, Jennifer Walls, Jennifer Roushey
- **Delaware Economic Development Office.** Diane Laird, Elaine Mulford
- **Delaware State Housing Authority.** Karen Horton, Penny Pierson  
Karen Horton gave a presentation on Delaware housing issues to the Laurel Plan Advisory Team on April 13, 2016. Penny Pierson gave a presentation on the Downtown Development District to the Advisory Team and public on September 29, 2016.
- **Department of State.** Madeline Dunn, Joan Larrivee

### Consultation with non-state agencies

- **Salisbury/Wicomico Metropolitan Planning Organization.** Keith Hall
- **USDA Rural Development.** William McGowan, Shannon Reid
- **University of Delaware.** Edward Lewandowski, Sustainable Coastal Communities Initiative; Troy Mix, Institute for Public Administration; Nicole Minni, Institute for Public Administration
- **Seaford.** Charles Anderson reviewed the plan, specifically the annexation section.
- **Sussex County.** Janelle Cornwell, Dan Parsons  
Plan recommendations, the annexation area and wastewater service area were discussed with the Sussex County Planning Director on January 25, 2017.

This plan was funded by a Neighborhood Building Blocks grant administered by the Delaware Economic Development Office.

Several key maps were prepared and revised by Nicole Minni, GISP, Associate Policy Scientist, **Institute for Public Administration, University of Delaware.**

Edward Lewandowski of the **University of Delaware's Sustainable Coastal Communities Initiative, Delaware Sea Grant**, provided facilitation for the Laurel Comprehensive Plan Advisory Team. The Sustainable Coastal Communities Initiative also funded printing of the final plan.

## REPORTS AND STUDIES REFERENCED IN THIS PLAN

- **Downtown Development District Plan.** May 2016, prepared by Cedar Creek Sustainable Planning Services on behalf of the Town of Laurel
- **A Comprehensive Housing Rehabilitation and Home Ownership Program** within Laurel's Proposed Downtown Development District, prepared by Cedar Creek Sustainable Planning Services, May 2016
- **Laurel, Delaware: Base Camp to Nanticoke Country; A Nature and Heritage Tourism Plan** by Conservation Community Consultants, September 2016
- **From Broad Creek to the Chesapeake: Guidance for Growth in Laurel that Protects our Water Quality,** prepared by Cedar Creek Sustainable Planning Services, April 2016
- **Plans and Proposal for Broad Creek Greenway and Waterfront Redevelopment in Laurel, Delaware,** prepared by the University of Delaware, September 2014
- **Laurel Tidewater Park** design documents prepared by Earthscape of Wallenstein, Ontario, 2016
- **Phase One Environmental Assessment:** The Ramble Waterfront Re-development Area, prepared by Brightfields Inc., November 2015
- **The Ramble Waterfront Environmental and Engineering Studies,** prepared by ForeSight Associates, March 2016
- **Town of Laurel Comprehensive Plan (Adopted),** prepared by Laurel Planning and Zoning Commission, March 2011
- **The Nanticoke Heritage Byway Corridor Management Plan,** prepared by the Delaware Department of Transportation, June 2016
- **Laurel, Delaware BrandTouch Manual,** prepared by Arnett Muldrow and Associates, April 2016
- **Delaware Housing Needs Assessment, 2015-2020,** prepared for Delaware State Housing Authority, September 2014



*The University of Delaware's Sustainable Coastal Communities Initiative funded printing of the final plan.*





**Cedar Creek**   
*Planning & Communications*  
[www.cedarcreekplanners.com](http://www.cedarcreekplanners.com)

*This plan funded by Delaware's Neighborhood Building Blocks Fund*