



TOWN OF LAUREL

DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT PLAN

2025

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Executive Summary

Over the last decade, Laurel's Downtown Development District (DDD) program has succeeded in sparking investment in housing and advancing the vision for The Ramble, setting the stage for continued investment and economic growth in years to come. As has been the case elsewhere in the State, the neighborhood-level challenges like downtowns take longer than a decade to fully address, and sustained investment is imperative to keep momentum focused. Issues related to low homeownership and high poverty rates prevail in Laurel, and while the investments related to the DDD have begun to move the needle, there is more work to be done. The support of the DDD program and its incentives are critical to continue the investment in Laurel to fulfill the vision and goals of the DDD program: **to enhance commercial viability, walkability, and overall livability.**



Commercial Viability



Walkability



Livability

Introduction

The Downtown Development Districts Act was enacted by the Delaware General Assembly in 2014 to spur private capital investment, stimulate job growth, improve commercial vitality, build a stable community of long-term residents by improving housing opportunities, and strengthen



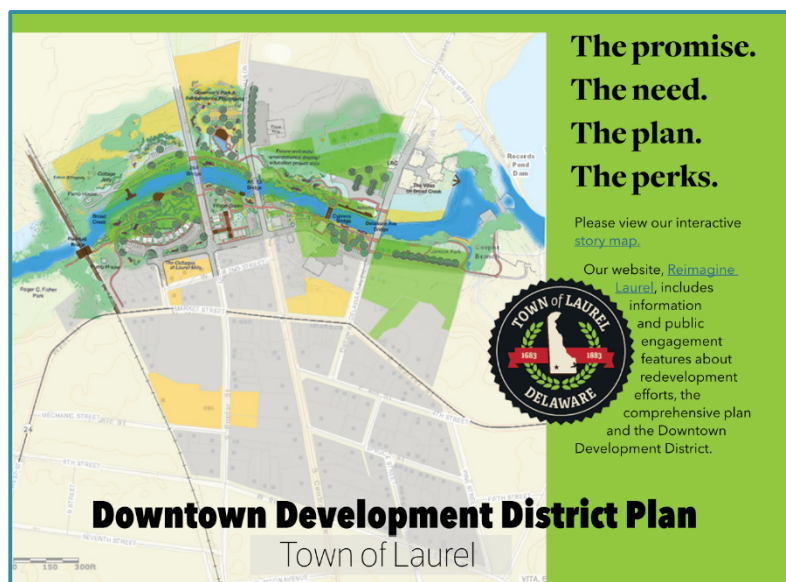
Figure 1: Governor Carney announces the third round of winners in August 2019

neighborhoods while harnessing the attraction that vibrant downtowns hold. The Town of Laurel applied to the State of Delaware for a District designation, which included a proposed district, documentation of need, proposed program impact, and available local incentives, and a plan for downtown revitalization. The Cabinet Committee on State Planning Issues reviews applications and makes recommendations to the Governor, who ultimately designates DDDs. Governor Jack Markell designated the Town of Laurel's DDD in the second round of

designations in August 2016. This designation entitles private construction projects within the District to receive rebates from the State of Delaware to offset up to 20 percent of their qualifying capital construction costs as well as other benefits. The initial ten-year designation ends in August 2026. Under the Act, the Town may apply for two consecutive five-year extensions. Currently, the Town of Laurel is applying for its first five-year renewal/extension.

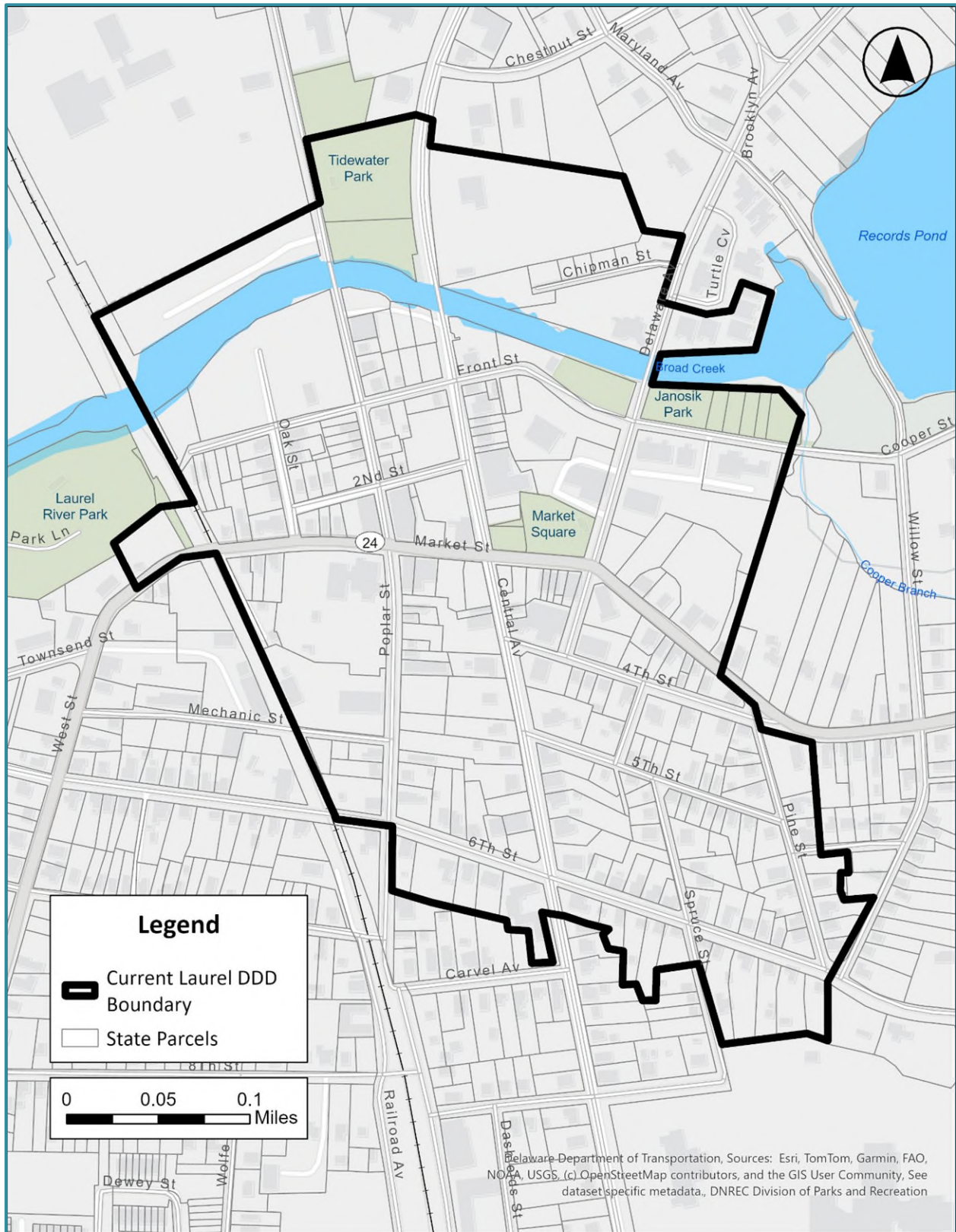
The 2016 District Plan developed in support of the DDD cited vacant properties, low homeownership rates, and absentee landlords among the challenges facing Laurel, and in particular, downtown Laurel. While acknowledging those challenges, the Plan highlighted the work of the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation and the plans for The Ramble, a mixed-use development project along Broad Creek, as evidence of hope for a brighter future for the community. The Town rebranded itself, “Laurel: Great Things Come Naturally” to reflect the Town’s location on Broad Creek and intention of becoming a launching point for heritage tourism in the Nanticoke region. This update to the District Plan will review the progress made since 2016, document the continued need for the program, and provide strategies and recommendations for improving the downtown over the next five years.

Figure 2: 2016 District Plan Title Page



This updated plan includes details of the comprehensive program evaluation, updated need and impact data, updated demographic data, updated district boundary (see **Figure 3** for the current DDD boundary), and a review of the vision, goals, and strategies developed in consultation with the Town.

Figure 3: Current (2025) Laurel DDD Boundary



Review of Program Success

The renewal process for the DDD designation includes an evaluation and self-assessment of the past implementation and performance. Downtown housing renewal and development along the Ramble have been the most successful part of Laurel's DDD designation. Many of the new homes have been built for owner occupancy at varying income thresholds, which is important to creating a sustainable community. According to the Town's 2018 Comprehensive Plan, the homeownership rate was 56.1 percent, significantly less than the State's homeownership rate of 71.6 percent.



Bringing The Ramble to fruition has been an important goal for downtown revitalization efforts and was a key strategy in the 2016 District Plan. Many of the components of The Ramble have been developed, while others are in the planning phase. The 2016 Downtown Development District Plan included 39 recommendations that were organized into four categories: adjust zoning and permitted land uses, bring The Ramble to life, improve community housing and home Ownership, and protect laurel's most valuable natural asset. **Appendix B categorizes the status of all 2016 recommendations.**

DDD Projects

In the first nine years of the Laurel DDD designation, 20 projects have been completed, most of which were small residential projects. Sussex County Habitat for Humanity has rehabilitated four homes and built five new homes. Milford Housing Development Corporation has constructed four new homes. Laurel Redevelopment Corporation has completed two small commercial projects. Other property owners have completed small projects, primarily residential. The Villas on Broad Creek is a large project completed that includes 20 duplex residential units on Broad Creek. In addition to the projects that have been completed, other projects are underway including the Promenade, a 28-unit subdivision that will provide affordable, owner-occupied housing for the local workforce in Laurel. The site of the Promenade covers a former town dump, which LRC intends to clean up alongside construction. **Table 1** summarizes DDD projects during the first ten years of the program including the size, use, and owner.

Table 1: Laurel DDD Projects

Owner	Project Size and Type
Sussex County Habitat for Humanity, Inc.	Small Residential
Sussex County Habitat for Humanity, Inc.	Small Residential
Sussex County Habitat for Humanity, Inc.	Small Residential
Sussex County Habitat for Humanity, Inc.	Small Residential
Sussex County Habitat for Humanity, Inc.	Small Residential
The Milford Housing Development Corporation	Small Residential
Sussex County Habitat for Humanity, Inc.	Small Residential
James Gullett	Small Residential
Randy Hill	Small Residential
Randy Hill	Small Residential
Ann Davis	Small Residential
Stephens Management Corporation	Small Residential
Sussex County Habitat for Humanity, Inc.	Small Residential
Milford Housing Development Corporation	Small Residential
Milford Housing Development Corporation	Small Residential
Milford Housing Development Corporation	Small Residential
Laurel Redevelopment Corporation	Small Commercial
Laurel Redevelopment Corporation	Small Commercial
Shree Radhe Krishna, LLC	Small Commercial
Villas on Broad Creek	Large Residential
<i>Bahar Holdings, LLC*</i>	<i>Large Mixed-Use</i>
<i>Laurel Redevelopment Corporation*</i>	<i>Large Residential</i>

* Not yet complete.

The value of the State rebates for Laurel's DDD projects from 2016 to 2024 was \$752,627, leveraging \$4,349,602 in private investments. The total value of the Town's incentives utilized during this period was \$92,275.40.

The Ramble



The Ramble is a planned mixed-use community, including a village green, waterfront cottages, a nature-based playground, kayak launch, and walking trails, that also has the goal to protect water quality in Broad Creek. Recognizing the potential of the Broad Creek waterfront to bring people and jobs back to the downtown, The Ramble's vision has evolved from purely watery quality to promote mixed-use development by pursuing the construction of a pocket neighborhood, (now known as the Promenade, a 28-unit subdivision underway), and attracting sustainable economic development and businesses, while still ensuring protection to the Broad Creek from erosion and pollution. While the public components of The Ramble are not DDD eligible, and have been removed from the updated boundary, The Ramble remains a community anchor and focal point of the downtown by providing essential parks and recreational services to the community and by celebrating Broad Creek.

Figure 4: Tidewater Park

The first project completed in The Ramble was the kayak launch, located across North Poplar Avenue to the west of Tidewater Park. Walking trails along the north side of Broad Creek connect the kayak launch to Tidewater Park, with end points at the launch and at the North Central Avenue Bridge. Trail users can enjoy views of the award-winning bioswale and constructed wetland as well as Broad Creek. **Figure 5** displays the kayak launch, walking trails, and the bioswale and constructed wetland.

Figure 5: Kayak Launch, Walking Trails, and the Bioswale and Constructed Wetland within The Ramble



Source: [Laurel Kayak/Canoe Launch - Paddle the Nanticoke / Paddle the Nanticoke](#)

Though not connected to local trails yet, Abbotts on Broad Creek Restaurant is located along Broad Creek within The Ramble’s footprint, just west of the Delaware Avenue Bridge. This modern restaurant with a deck overlooking Broad Creek was restored under the DDD program in 2017 by the LRC and contributes to the mixed-use vision of The Ramble by adding quality commercial development. **Figure 6** shows the Abbotts on Broad Creek Restaurant.

Figure 6: Abbotts on Broad Creek Waterfront



Source: *Abbott's on Broad Creek* | Bay to Bay News

As mentioned previously, a 28-unit residential project known as the Promenade is currently underway by the LRC. Located along the south side of Broad Creek just west of South Poplar Avenue and north of West Front Street, this project advances the mixed-use vision of The Ramble by adding quality homes to the community. **Figure 16 (Page 26)** in the **Key Projects** section displays a rendering of the Promenade project.

Stakeholder Feedback

As part of the process to evaluate the program and update the District Plan, the project team conducted a program evaluation that included stakeholder interviews, a moderated focus group discussion, and review of available program data.

Stakeholder Interviews

Stakeholders interview participants included representatives from LRC, Laurel Police Department, NeighborGood Partners, and Laurel Code Enforcement. Participants were engaged through questions tailored to their expertise and role relative to the DDD program. Interviews were conducted between April 3 and May 29, 2025. Detailed interview summaries are included in **Appendix A**.

As stakeholders represented a range of perspectives within the Town of Laurel, there were various views of which aspects of the DDD program were most beneficial. Of the interviewees, only LRC was a direct beneficiary of the DDD incentives. All interviewees consider the program successful. LRC noted that the DDD incentives provide critical assistance for their projects. Multiple participants expressed that the program could be better advertised; however, as one participant expressed, there has been a “boom” in development in recent years. Other participants expressed there are still enduring issues in Laurel that remain largely unaffected by the DDD program: low homeownership rates, insufficient code enforcement leading to vacant and derelict buildings, and crime.

Some of the interviewees offered ways to improve the DDD Program and overall quality of life in Laurel. One participant suggested developers should be able to stack funding sources and that

they should still be eligible for DDD incentives after using other funds¹. Other interviewees noted there is a lack of community facilities and extracurricular activities in Laurel, especially for youth. One participant suggested using the Community Facilities Direct Loan and Grant Program offered by US Department of Agriculture (USDA), which provides affordable funding to develop essential community facilities in rural areas and could be considered by the Town.

As noted previously, several interviewees identified code enforcement related to vacant and derelict buildings as a persistent issue in Laurel. An interview with the code enforcement representative shed light on some hurdles the Town faces in enforcing Town Codes. As a three-person department with only one full-time employee, code enforcement has limited capacity to resolve all code violations in the Town. Town Council adopted a vacant house ordinance which identifies properties with no water usages for 90 consecutive days as vacant. These properties must pay an initial \$500 annual fee, which then increases by \$200 every year it is left vacant up to five years. According to the code enforcement representative, the primary issue is not lack of effort, but a lack of resources. Most of the code enforcement department's time, including an entire part-time position, is occupied by rental unit inspections and violations on properties that are in chronic disrepair. They condemn many houses due to code violations, and landlords do the minimum of what is required to reverse the condemnation.

Focus Group

All nine investors who participated in the DDD program were invited to a focus group held at the Laurel Town Hall (**Figure 7**) on April 24, 2025. Three people attended. The focus group participants responded to questions and had general dialogue regarding participants' experience with the program. All stakeholders who participated in the focus group agreed that the DDD incentives were critically important to their projects. One private developer indicated that his project would not have worked without it. The availability of the State rebate was instrumental in securing the financing needed for his project. The Town's reduction of impact fees was also cited as helpful, particularly on mixed use projects. The abatement of real estate taxes was also noted to be helpful, especially for projects that involve affordable homeownership.

Figure 7: Laurel Town Hall



¹ There are many funding sources that can be "stacked" with DDD funds. Some funding sources may not allow for this, but the restriction is not with the DDD program.

Participants noted that Sussex County no longer offers their match of the State rebate up to \$10,000.

Participants in the focus group stated that the costs of permits and other fees related to development in Laurel tend to be high compared to other jurisdictions. This was not independently verified. The reduction of water and wastewater impact fees helps to lower this cost.

Sussex County Habitat for Humanity indicated that the availability of land for new home construction is running out in the DDD, and there was discussion of the benefit of expanding the boundary westward, especially southwest.

Participants in the focus group noted concerns regarding vacant and abandoned properties in the downtown and how these create an eyesore that detracts from the downtown and discourages investment. Some stakeholders expressed concern that the Town could do more to address vacant and dilapidated properties. The issue of vacant and abandoned properties was also raised in the 2016 District Plan and in the 2019 Comprehensive Plan.

The Continued Need

Housing and Occupancy

As noted in the 2016 Downtown Development District Plan, the Town of Laurel has struggled with low homeownership and occupied housing rates. To address this issue, 17 residential projects have gone through the Laurel DDD program, including two large projects totaling 14 units. This progress is not necessarily reflected in ACS five-year estimates data, which show a decrease in both homeownership and occupancy rates within Census Tract 518.02 from 2014 to 2023. As stated in the 2016 District Plan, the Census Bureau does not report on the DDD boundary specifically; therefore, Census Tract 518.02 provides the closest match to the DDD boundary. **Figure 8** presents the Census boundaries compared to the DDD boundary. This complicates drawing conclusions on the impact of the DDD program using Census Tract level data because this data encompasses an area well beyond the DDD boundary.

Figure 8: Laurel DDD Boundary and Census Boundaries

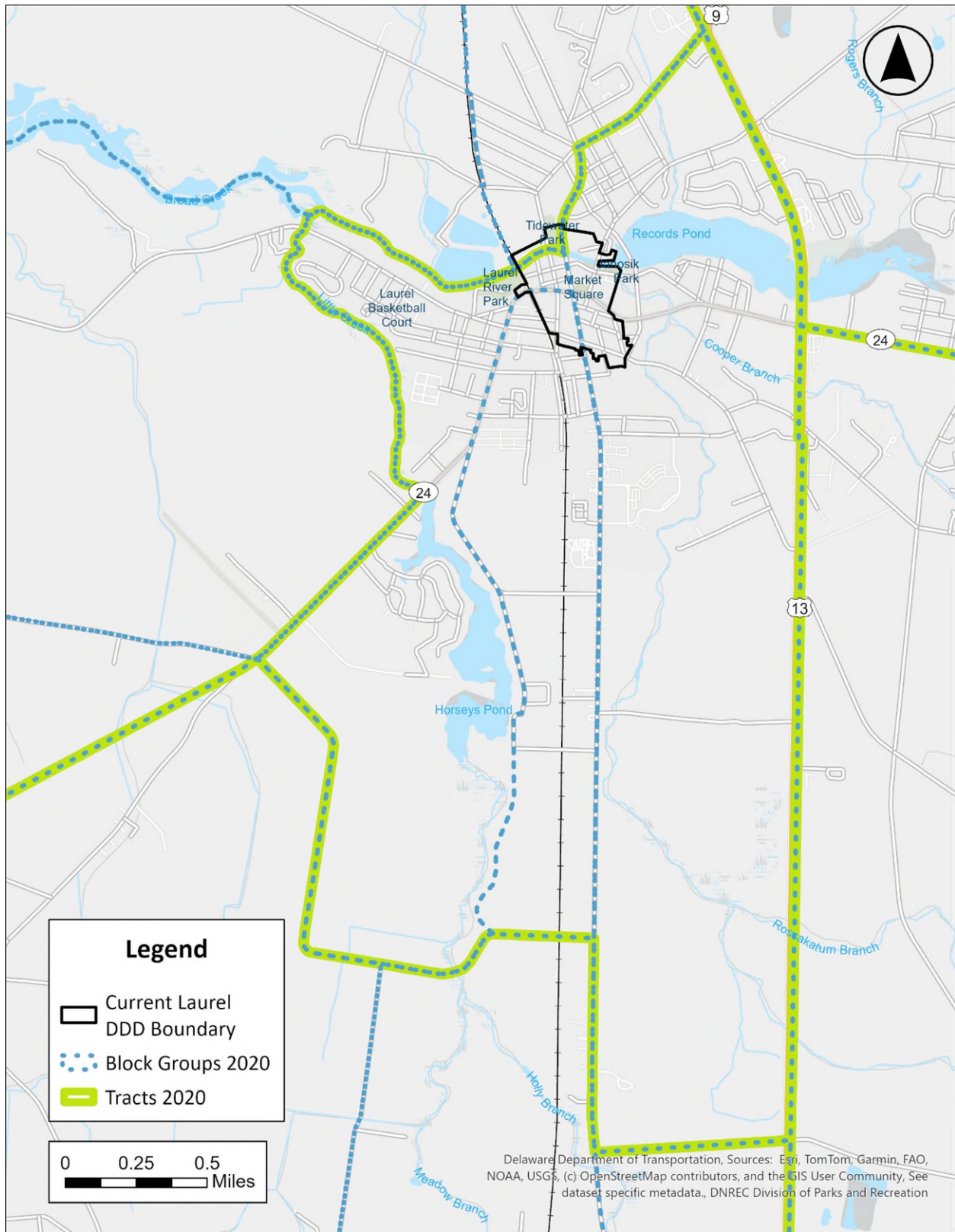


Table 2 summarizes housing and occupancy features across the State of Delaware, Sussex County, Town of Laurel, and Census Tract 518.02 in 2014 and 2023.

Table 2: Housing and Occupancy Across State of Delaware, Sussex County, Town of Laurel, and Census Tract 518.02

Occupancy Feature (2014)	Geography							
	Delaware		Sussex County		Town of Laurel		Tract 518.02	
	2014	2023	2014	2023	2014	2023	2014	2023
Total Population	917,060	1,005,872	203,737	247,799	3,816	4,043	4,337	4,06272
Percent Owner-Occupied	72%	72%	78%	81%	56%	36%	67%	60%
Percent Renter-Occupied	18%	28%	12%	19%	44%	64%	33%	40%
Vacancy Percent	18%	13%	38%	30%	11%	10%	9%	16%
Median Home Value	\$232,900	\$326,800	\$231,400	\$353,300	\$131,300	\$192,700	\$148,600	\$227,300
Percent Built 1949 or Earlier	14%	8%	9%	5%	25%	30%	23%	28%

Source: 2010-2014 ACS 5-Year Estimate and 2019-2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates

Despite not having census data specific to the DDD, it is evident that housing is still a prevailing issue within the Town and DDD. Of the occupied housing units within Census Tract 518.02, 40 percent are renter-occupied, which is higher than the rate in Sussex County (19 percent) and Delaware (28 percent). The Town of Laurel exceeds all three geographies with 64 percent of the housing units occupied by renters.

As reflected in **Table 2**, there is a much higher proportion of housing units built 1949 or earlier in Census Tract 518.02 and the Town of Laurel compared to Delaware and Sussex County in both 2014 and 2023. While the percentage of these older housing units declined in Delaware (six percent reduction) and Sussex County (four percent reduction) from 2016 and 2023, they increased by five percent in Census Tract 518.02 and the Town of Laurel.

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Income and Poverty

Table 3: Income and Poverty Across State of Delaware, Sussex County, Town of Laurel, and Census Tract 518.02

Income Feature (2014)	Geography							
	Delaware		Sussex County		Town of Laurel		Tract 518.02	
	2014	2023	2014	2023	2014	2023	2014	2023
Percent of Population Below Poverty Threshold	8%	11%	9%	12%	25%	36%	23%	22%
Median Household Income in the Past 12 Months	\$60,231	\$82,855	\$53,505	\$78,162	\$33,387	\$44,593	\$39,428	\$62,358
Percent of Households with Low and Moderate Income	38%	41%	36%	43%	44%	72%	43%	58%

Source: 2010-2014 ACS 5-Year Estimates and HUD 2016 Low and Moderate Income Summary Data and 2019-2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates and HUD 2023 Low and Moderate Income Summary Data

From 2014 to 2023 the poverty rate increased across every geographic area in **Table 3** except for Census Tract 518.02 which decreased by one percent. In 2023, the poverty rate in Census Tract 518.02 continues to exceed that of Delaware and Sussex County although by a smaller margin. The poverty rate in the Town of Laurel increased by eleven percentage points from 2014 to 2023 and is about three times higher than the State of Delaware and Sussex County according to the 2023 ACS five-year estimates.

While Census Tract 518.02 experiences a lower rate of households with low to moderate income than the Town of Laurel, it still exceeds the percentages of both the State of Delaware and Sussex County in 2014 and 2023. In the five-year estimates for 2023, the gap between low to moderate income rates of Census Tract 518.02 and Delaware and Sussex County more than doubled.

Since DDD program implementation, Laurel still experiences the lowest median income of the towns within Sussex County; however, it has increased at a higher rate than four other towns (**Table 4**).

Table 4: Median Household Income of Towns within Sussex County

Municipality	Median Household Income (2014)	Median Household Income (2023)	Difference from 2014 to 2023 (\$)	Difference from 2014 to 2023 (%)
Laurel	\$33,387	\$44,593	\$11,206	+34%
Blades	\$34,286	\$62,596	\$28,310	+83%
Seaford	\$35,813	\$51,120	\$15,307	+43%
Delmar	\$35,938	\$61,344	\$25,406	+71%
Selbyville	\$40,195	\$81,845	\$41,650	+104%
Greenwood	\$41,500	\$72,063	\$30,563	+74%
Ellendale	\$41,563	\$66,875	\$25,312	+61%
Frankford	\$42,396	\$74,583	\$32,187	+76%
Millsboro	\$46,403	\$77,750	\$31,347	+68%
Georgetown	\$47,525	\$47,423	-\$102	-0%
Dagsboro	\$47,614	\$64,250	\$16,636	+35%

Municipality	Median Household Income (2014)	Median Household Income (2023)	Difference from 2014 to 2023 (\$)	Difference from 2014 to 2023 (%)
Milton	\$49,615	\$64,906	\$15,291	+31%
Milford	\$52,274	\$55,265	\$2,991	+6%
Bridgeville	\$52,639	\$69,631	\$16,992	+32%
Lewes	\$55,917	\$92,375	\$36,458	+65%
Rehoboth	\$79,297	\$141,250	\$61,953	+78%

Age Distribution

The Town of Laurel trends younger than its surrounding geographies, with a lower median age than Sussex County and the State of Delaware in 2014 and 2023 (see **Table 5**).

Table 5: Median Age of Laurel, Sussex County, and Delaware

	Town of Laurel	Sussex County	Delaware
Median Age 2014	27.7	46.5	39.1
Median Age 2023	30	51.4	41.5

Source: 2010-2014 ACS 5-Year Estimates and 2019-2023 ACS 5-Year Estimates

As reflected in **Figure 9** and **Figure 10**, the most populous age cohort in the Town of Laurel is ages five to 17, representing 19 percent of the population in 2014 and 26 percent of the population in 2023. This surpasses the proportion of individuals ages five to 17 in Sussex County (14 percent in 2014 and 2023) and Delaware (16 percent in 2014 and 15 percent in 2023).

Figure 9: Age Cohorts within Delaware, Sussex County, and Laurel (2014)

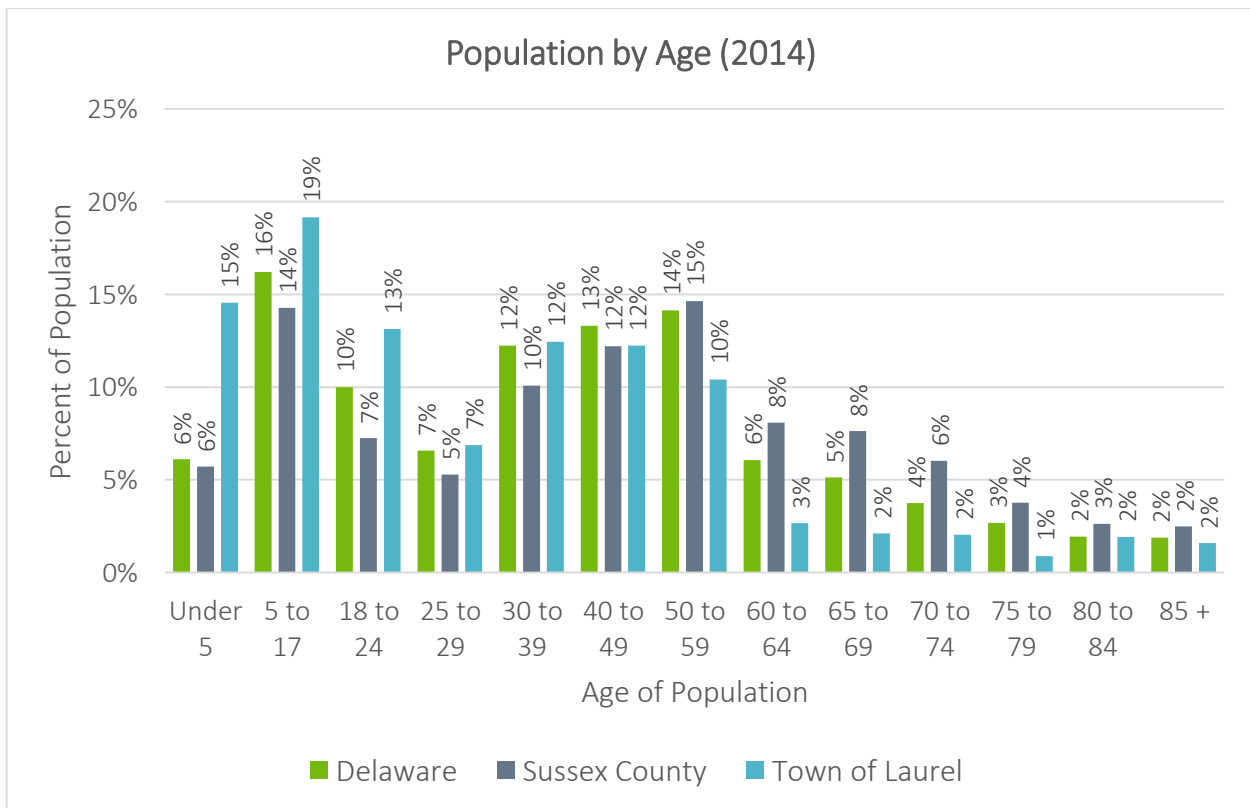
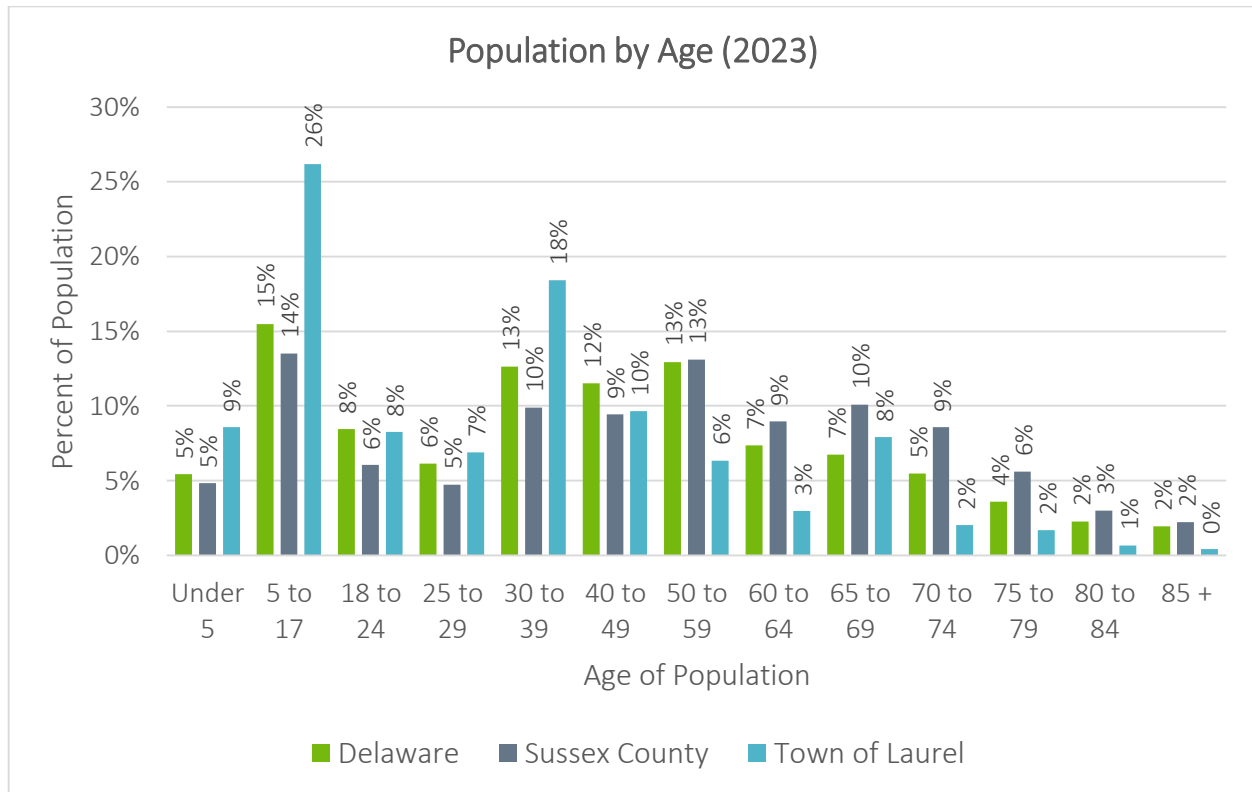


Figure 10: Age Cohorts within Delaware, Sussex County, and Laurel (2023)



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The Plan

Vision and Goals

The past ten years of the Laurel DDD program have been successful in creating opportunities for affordable housing and homeownership as well as repairing the existing housing stock. These improvements are important to meet the vision of the DDD, but more progress is needed. The vision of the DDD program in the next five years remains: **to enhance commercial viability, walkability, and overall livability.**

The following priorities were established to realize this 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 homeownership.



Ensure that the town's key natural asset, Broad Creek, is protected from pollution, erosion, and uses that devalue it.

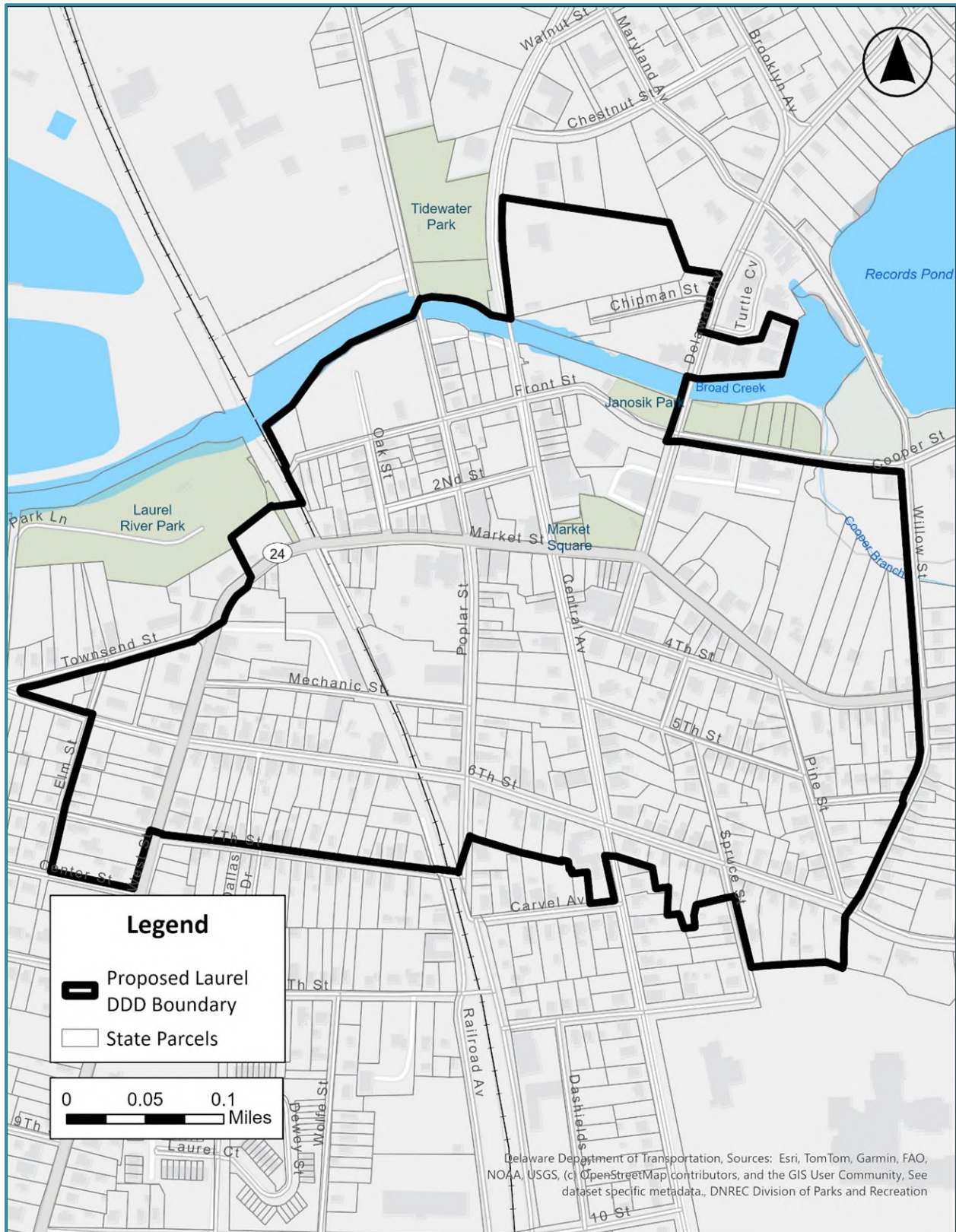
District Boundary

For the next five years of the DDD program in Laurel, a new boundary has been developed. The revised boundary will better align with need and impact, as well as maximize the area eligible for the DDD program.

The current Laurel DDD boundary is approximately 79 acres. As of 2022, local governments with populations less than 9,000 individuals are permitted to expand their DDD boundaries up to 105 acres. The proposed district boundary adds area to the west of Railroad Avenue to provide opportunities for housing development and commercial investment. Additional area is proposed to the east of the current boundary to promote housing investment. The inclusion of these areas would amount to approximately 32 acres added to the current Laurel DDD boundary.

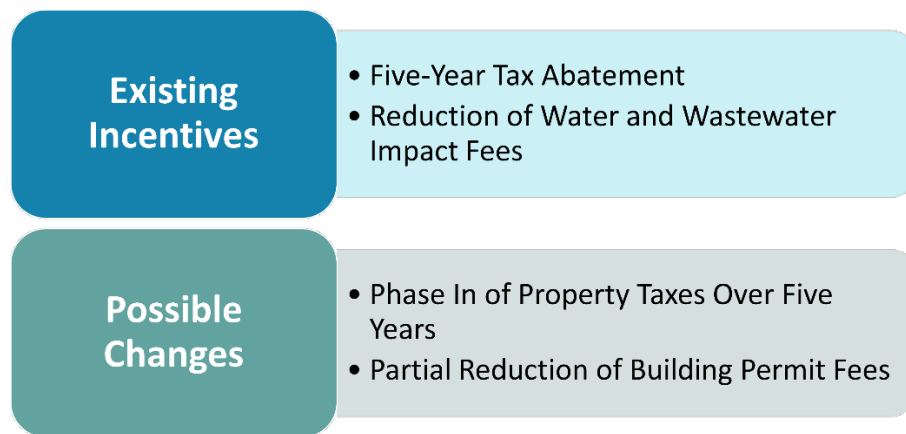
The current DDD boundary includes eight acres of land of parkland owned by the Town of Laurel and, therefore, ineligible for the DDD program incentives. The revised DDD boundary removes these properties to redistribute and expand the allowed area to properties that may benefit from the DDD program. **Figure 11** presents the proposed district boundary for the next five years.

Figure 11: Proposed Laurel DDD Boundary



Strategies and Recommendations

Based on the review of the DDD program success in Laurel, changes to two of the local incentives are recommended.



Currently the Town offers a five-year tax abatement; however, a phasing in of property taxes over five years is recommended. **Table 6** presents the proposed tax structure for the next five years of the DDD Program.

Table 6: Proposed Tax Structure

Years from Project Completion	Phase In of Town Property Taxes
One Year	0%
Two Years	25%
Three Years	50%
Four Years	75%
Five Years	100%

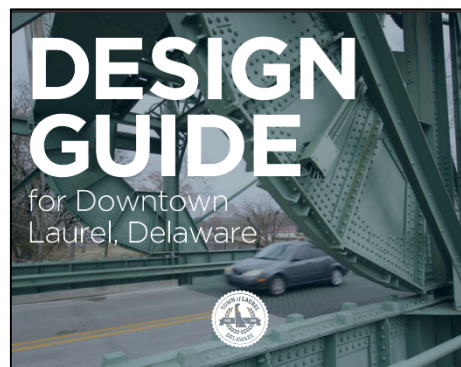
Additionally, to incentivize residential and commercial development, a 50 percent reduction in building permit fees is recommended to replace the graduated reduction of water and wastewater impact fees. This allows the Town to collect revenue needed to fund infrastructure improvements, while offsetting this impact with the building permit fee reduction.

This section also presents strategic action items designed to be implemented or initiated over the next five years to achieve the vision and goals of the Laurel DDD program. The recommendations are categorized based on the priorities they serve.



Ensure Zoning and Permitted Land Uses, as well as Design Standards Further the Vision of a Commercially Viable, Walkable, and Livable Town Core

1. Review the permitted uses within each DDD zoning classification to ensure that they do not present barriers to redevelopment or permit uses that are incompatible with redevelopment.
2. Take steps to ensure the commercial center along Market Street is attractive and welcoming to visitors and walkers. Present these establishments with options and give them a reasonable timetable to comply.
3. Develop and adopt landscaping and building design standards and a pattern book to preserve the character and look and feel of the T-C and M-R districts.
4. Ensure that consistent signage requirements in the DDD are included in the Town's updated zoning ordinance.
5. Work with DelDOT to create a bicycle and pedestrian circulation plan for the downtown and areas surrounding the downtown.
6. During the comprehensive plan update, revisit the size of Laurel's Historic District and the purpose and requirements of the district – especially within the DDD area.



Bring The Ramble Waterfront Redevelopment Initiative to Life and Attract Businesses That Will Further Laurel's Goals for Sustainable Economic Development

1. Work with DNREC Site Investigation and Restoration program to secure brownfield cleanup funds for appropriate sites before any acquisitions are completed.
2. Continue to activate The Ramble site for festivals, paddling events and other public gatherings.
3. Attract signature commercial enterprises that further town's nature and heritage tourism objectives – such as brewpub or outdoor recreation vendors.
4. Work with DelDOT to ensure context-sensitive design and pedestrian element of bridge rehabilitation project.
5. Continue to expand the trail and path system within The Ramble, and connect it to other bicycle and pedestrian amenities to make it more widely accessible to the community.



Improve the Condition of Both Owner-Occupied and Rental Housing and Encourage Homeownership

1. Work with nonprofit partners to design and implement a comprehensive home rehabilitation and homebuyer program.
2. Set priorities for the program, beginning in the mixed-use neighborhood west of Central Avenue between The Ramble and Market Street.
3. Ensure that owners of larger homes along Central Avenue and Market Street, who may not be income-qualified for other programs, are aware of the Historic Tax Credit and other options.
4. Adopt an ordinance that requires absentee landlords who have a local property management company with whom tenants and the town can communicate.
5. Ensure that town codes are consistently enforced.



Ensure Broad Creek is Protected from Pollution, Erosion, and Uses That Devalue It

1. Make The Ramble a model of sustainable, low-impact development practices and perhaps a “credit bank” to offset development projects elsewhere in Laurel.
2. Ensure that the Promenade is built to superior design standards with at least a “net-zero” impact on water quality in Broad Creek.
3. Continue to partner with DNREC to identify sources of funding green stormwater installations through The Ramble.
4. Ensure that, as planned, new development avoids the floodplain.
5. Maintain and grow Laurel’s tree canopy, setting a goal in the Comprehensive Plan update.
6. Work with the Sussex Conservation District to adopt a goose-control program (see “Broad Creek to the Chesapeake” report).
7. Clean up contaminated sites that are targets of acquisition by the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation.
8. Adopt landscaping and design standards that protect both the historic character of the area and water quality (Priorities 1 and 2).

Key Projects

The residential development during the first decade of the Laurel DDD program has been successful, with 17 of the 20 completed projects designated as residential. Improving the housing stock of the Town is a critical component of revitalization but is not the only focus of the 2016 District Plan, which also seeks to attract quality commercial development and improve the quality of life for residents. Key projects have been identified to strategically and holistically implement the vision of the 2016 District Plan.

A high priority neighborhood, known as “Old Town”, is located immediately west of Central Avenue and between the Ramble and Market Street. Within Old Town is the site of Central Station, located at 201 North Central Avenue. LRC is restoring the historic building on this property to welcome Davelli’s Bagel Café, a

locally owned and operated café known for its bagels, fresh breads, and pastries. **Figure 12** shows before and after images of the restored property. This project supports the growing food scene in the DDD and contributes to quality commercial development sought after.

Just across Central Avenue from the Old Town neighborhood sits a one-story masonry building located at 102 East Front Street. This building is also undergoing restoration by LRC and will be transformed into a new café. This marks another exciting addition to the community’s growing food scene and is representative of the commercial development visualized in the 2016 District Plan. **Figure 13** displays the property before restoration and a conceptual rendering of what it may look like after restoration.

Figure 12: Central Station Before and After



Figure 13: 102 East Front Street Cafe Before and After



Old Town is slated for other development in addition to Central Station at 201 North Central Avenue. LRC owns six (6) parcels on this block and envisions mixed-use development which aligns with the 2016 District Plan recommendation to “set priorities for the program, beginning in the mixed-use neighborhood west of Central Avenue and between The Ramble and Market Street.” **Figure 14** presents a rendering of this proposed mixed-use neighborhood.

Figure 14: Central Avenue Mixed-Use Development



Southeast of Old Town is the Laurel Senior Center, which is in a historic theater building on North Central Avenue. The building façade has preserved some historic architectural features but could

Figure 15: Laurel Senior Center



use restoration to reach its full potential. The Laurel Senior Center provides an invaluable and multi-purpose community focal point where aging individuals may come together for services and activities. The center strives to enhance dignity, support independence and encourage involvement in and with the community, thereby enhancing the livelihood of residents. Working with the Senior Center to restore the historic theater has been a topic of discussion within the community. Ensuring that the Senior Center’s needs are central to such a restoration would be a priority. This has been identified as a key project because it is an iconic building whose restoration could be a catalyst for further redevelopment of Central Avenue.

The Promenade is another highly anticipated residential project underway in the Ramble footprint. As noted previously, it is a 28-unit subdivision that intends to provide high quality yet affordable, owner-occupied housing for Laurel residents (see **Figure 16**). The site of the Promenade is located between West Front Street and Broad Creek and covers a former town dump, which LRC intends to clean up alongside construction. The Promenade is critical in realizing visions outlined in the 2016 District Plan: to improve community housing and home ownership and to remediate and leverage waterfront property along Broad Creek.

Figure 16: The Promenade Conceptual Rendering



Source: [The Promenade – Laurel Redevelopment Corporation](#)

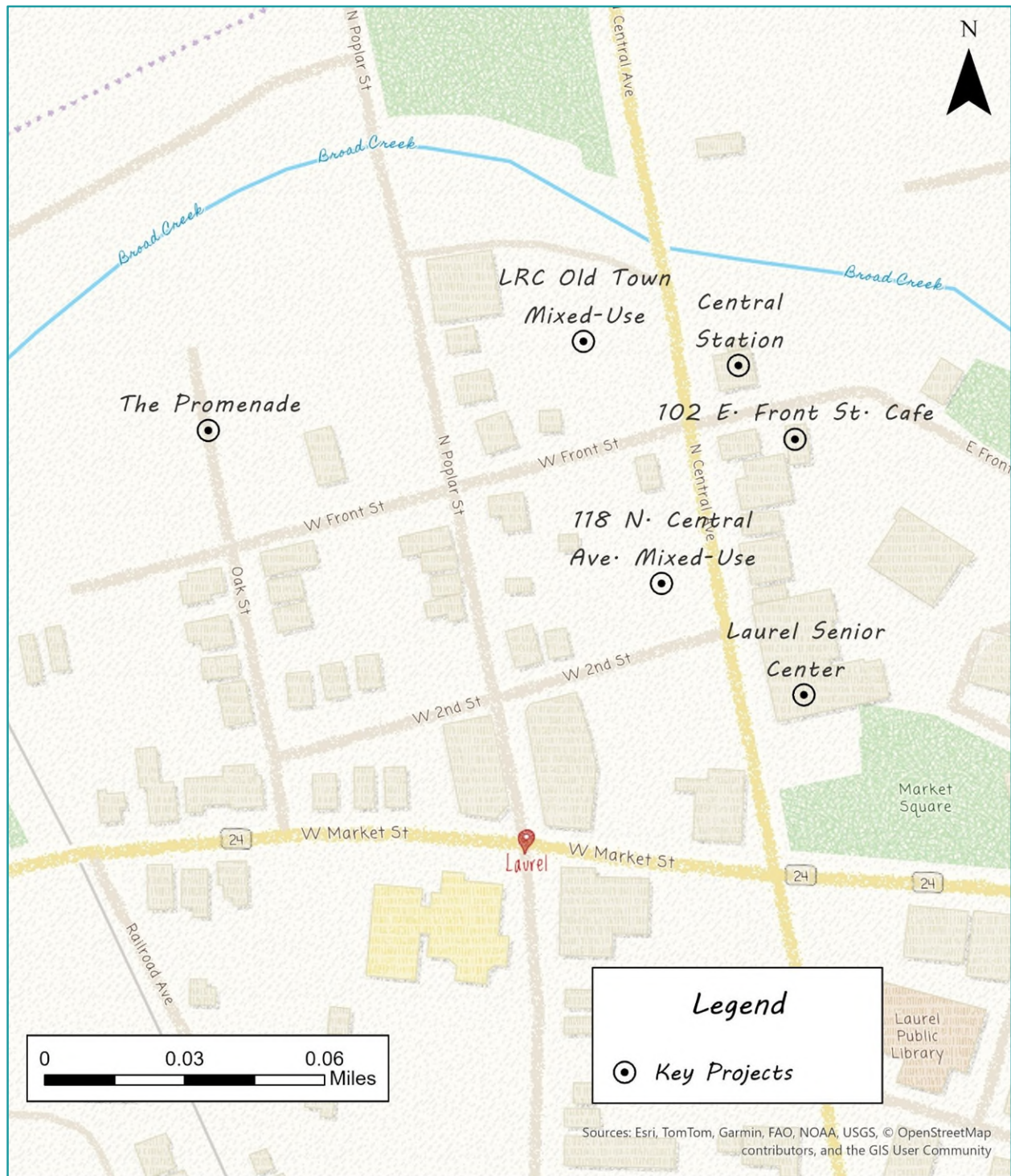
A mixed-use project, located with the Old Town neighborhood at 118 North Central Avenue, has applied for a large fund reservation. This project will offer laundromats on the first floor and rental units on the upper levels. The commercial and residential spaces complement the other projects within the Old Town neighborhood and work towards the same goal to provide economic opportunity and high quality housing. Construction has already begun as displayed by the photo taken April 24, 2025.

Figure 17: 118 North Central Avenue Construction



All the key projects in the Laurel DDD are clustered along Central Avenue and Front Street. **Figure 18** shows the locations of each key project.

Figure 18: Key Project Locations



Appendix A – Stakeholder Interviews

Appendix A - Stakeholder Interviews

A series of interviews were conducted to gain insight into a range of perspectives regarding the Laurel DDD program and assess where the program has been successful and where there are opportunities to improve. Conversations were guided by a prewritten questionnaire tailored to the expertise and role of the participant within the Laurel DDD program. Interviews were conducted between April 3 and May 29, 2025.

Name	Robert Kracyla
Title	Police Chief
Organization	Laurel Police Department
Interview Date/Time	April 3, 2025, 10:00 AM

Program Success and Areas for Improvement:

Robert has not seen much of a shift in Laurel since the implementation of the DDD program and he notes that Seaford is a good example of a successful DDD program. In Laurel, vacant housing and drug and violent crimes are prevailing issues that the program has yet to impact. He suggests demolishing vacant buildings and stronger code enforcement.

Robert believes there are too many public-assisted housing developments in Laurel and not much opportunity for commercial development. He also notes that the youth in Laurel do not have enough extracurricular resources and job opportunities, which adds to socioeconomic issues that ultimately drive crime.

District Boundary Suggestions:

Robert believes Laurel should leverage its waterfront; therefore, he suggests expanding the district's footprint along Broad Creek to the maximum extent possible.

Name	Brian Shannon
Title	Executive Director
Organization	Laurel Redevelopment Corporation (LRC)
Interview Date/Time	April 9, 2025, 10:00 AM

Program Success and Areas for Improvement:

Brian believes the DDD program in Laurel has been successful, especially in the past few years as there has been a boom in development from organizations other than LRC. He said the Villas on Broad Creek would not have been possible without DDD incentives. Both tax abatement and reduction of impact fees are very helpful incentives; however, he notes that there is room to reduce impact fees more. Brian also suggests that the DDD program should allow a mix of funds to be stacked. He has developed properties using the Catalyst Fund, which is incompatible with DDD incentives.

Code enforcement was noted as a huge concern during his time in Laurel. He has seen derelict houses, even some historic dwellings, remain unaddressed. Brian believes that code enforcement in Laurel should be stronger and more proactive.

Brian feels that Laurel staff do not thoroughly communicate the DDD program to potential participants and that staff may refer interested parties to other resources. He suggests the Town hire an Economic Development and Public Relations position to help fill this void.

District Boundary Suggestions:

Brian Suggests expanding the DDD boundary to include the Rosemont historic house and the property located at the southeast corner of the Cooper Street and Willow Street intersection.

Name	Joe Myer
Title	Former Executive Director
Organization	NeighborGood
Interview Date/Time	April 17, 2025, 900 AM

Program Success and Areas for Improvement:

Joe has had minimal experience with the Laurel DDD program so he cannot speak about its success. He notes that housing is a main issue in Laurel along with extremely high rates of renter-occupied houses. Joe suggests that Laurel take advantage of community facility resources such as the USDA Community Facilities Direct Loan and Grant Program which supports efforts to provide essential infrastructure like libraries, schools and community centers.

He has heard rumblings about lack of code enforcement in the town but is inclined to believe that code enforcement staff are simply overwhelmed and may not have adequate resources to address all violations. Joe notes that due to lack of resources, the town does not maintain the streets. He is reluctant to put that responsibility on Homeowners Associations, especially when the goal is to build affordable houses.

Joe feels there should be administrative assistance with the DDD program and hopes there is a way to ensure that once homeownership is created, that is not bought out by investors and then rented out.

District Boundary Suggestions:

Joe did not have specific suggestions for adjusting the DDD boundary. They are working on a large residential development on a 78 acre property along South Central Avenue; however, it is too far from the current district boundary to consider inclusion.

Name	Ken West
Title	Director of Code Enforcement
Organization	Laurel Code Enforcement
Interview Date/Time	May 29, 2025, 9:00 AM

Program Success and Areas for Improvement:

Ken believes the DDD program has been successful and those who have used it have had a positive experience, but he feels more people should take advantage of it. He thinks that the DDD program could benefit from more advertising and informing potential program users about the incentives. Most of the DDD projects have been residential.

Ken is aware of the vacant and derelict owner-occupied housing unit issue and says they enacted a vacant home ordinance. This ordinance identifies properties with no water usages in 90 days as vacant. These properties receive an initial \$500 annual fine, which then increases by \$200 every year it is left vacant up to five years. They add the fee to property taxes, but some have not paid property taxes for up to 15 years. Occasionally these properties go to sheriff sale, but they are often bought up by landlords for cheap rental properties. Ken inspects around 800 rental units a year. They condemn a lot of houses, and the landlords typically do the minimum to get things to code. Most of the code enforcement department's time, including an entire part-time position, is occupied by rental unit violations that are in chronic disrepair. The code enforcement department is comprised of one full-time employee, Ken, and two part-time employees; therefore, they are limited in what violations they can go after.

District Boundary Suggestions:

Ken supports expanding the DDD boundary westward because these properties are mainly occupied by homeowners.

Appendix B – 2016 District Plan Recommendations

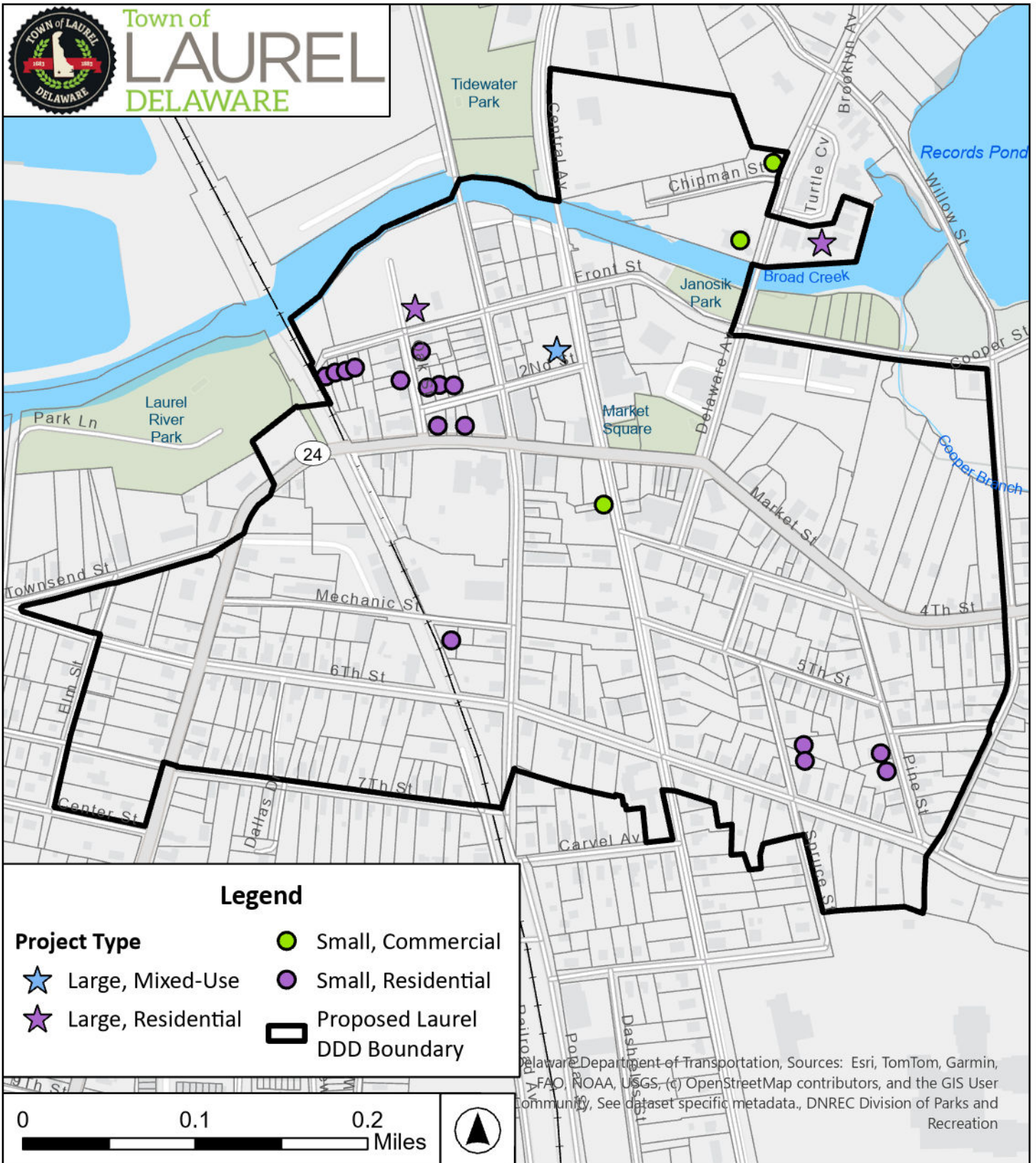
Recommendation	Status	Lead Agency & Implementation Partners
Category 1: Adjust Zoning and Permitted Land Uses		
Align the permitted uses within the Marine Resources District with its stated purpose in the zoning ordinance. Some uses appear to be incompatible with the protection of Broad Creek and its viewshed.	Complete	Town Council, Town Planning and Zoning Commission
Rezone the one property zoned Commercial to Marine Resources, or at least a subdivided portion of that property.	Complete	Town Council, Town Planning and Zoning Commission
Review the permitted uses within each DDD zoning classification to ensure that they do not present barriers to redevelopment or permit uses that are incompatible with redevelopment.	Ongoing	Town Council, Town Planning and Zoning Commission
Take steps to ensure the commercial center along Market Street is attractive and welcoming to visitors and walkers. Present these establishments with options and give them a reasonable timetable to comply.	Ongoing	Town Council, Town Planning and Zoning Commission
Develop and adopt landscaping and building design standards and a pattern book to preserve the character and look and feel of the T-C and M-R districts	Not Started	Town Council, Town Planning and Zoning Commission
Pursue funding for a façade improvement program that will offer incentives for building owners to participate (such as low-interest loan or matching grant).	Not Started	Town Council, Town Planning and Zoning Commission

Adopt an ordinance regarding consistent signage requirements in the DDD.	Not Started	Town Council, Town Planning and Zoning Commission
During the comprehensive plan update process, work with DelDOT to develop a “Complete Streets” approach to circulation in the area.	Not Started	DelDOT
During the comprehensive plan update, revisit the size of Laurel’s Historic District and the purpose and requirements of the district – especially within the DDD area.	No Started	Town Council, Town Planning and Zoning Commission
Category 2: Bring The Ramble to Life		
Acquire strategic parcels that are key to successful implementation of The Ramble plan.	Complete	LRC, Town
Complete low-impact green stormwater installation for nature-based playground.	Complete	LRC, Town
Work with DNREC Site Investigation and Restoration program to secure brownfield cleanup funds for appropriate site <i>before</i> any acquisitions are completed.	Ongoing	DNREC, LRC
Continue to activate The Ramble site for festivals, paddling events and other public gatherings.	Ongoing	LRC, DNREC, Delmarva Birding Weekends
Secure funding for and install nature-based playground and planned trail network, including connection under railroad trestle to Roger Fisher Park.	Ongoing	Town, LRC, Bond Bill, DNREC, Community Transportation Fund
Attract quality developer for planned pocket neighborhood of cottages. Have design standards in place (Category 1).	Complete	LRC

Attract signature commercial enterprises that further town's nature and heritage tourism objectives – such as brewpub or outfitters.	Ongoing	Chamber of Commerce
Adopt landscape architecture design standards.	Not Started	Town Council, Town Planning and Zoning Commission
Work with DelDOT to ensure context-sensitive design and pedestrian element of bridge rehabilitation project.	Not Started	DelDOT
Ensure that Marine Resources zoning category provides the appropriate framework for The Ramble to build out (Category 1).	Complete	Town Council, Town Planning and Zoning Commission
Category 3: Improve Community Housing and Home Ownership		
Design and implement a comprehensive home rehabilitation and homebuyer program with nonprofit partners.	Ongoing/Partially Addressed	LRC, Sussex County Habitat for Humanity, USDA Rural Development, NCALL, Historic Tax Credit, Town, SEU Energy Credit
As an element of this program, address vacant properties to stabilize the neighborhood through a combination of enforcement, acquisition and rehabilitation appropriate to the property owner's circumstances.	Complete	Town, LRC, NeighborGood, Milford Housing
Provide a coordinator to design and launch the program, including initial outreach to all affected residents, in collaboration with nonprofit partners.	Complete	Town, LRC, NeighborGood
Set priorities for the program, beginning in the mixed-use neighborhood west of	Ongoing	Town, LRC

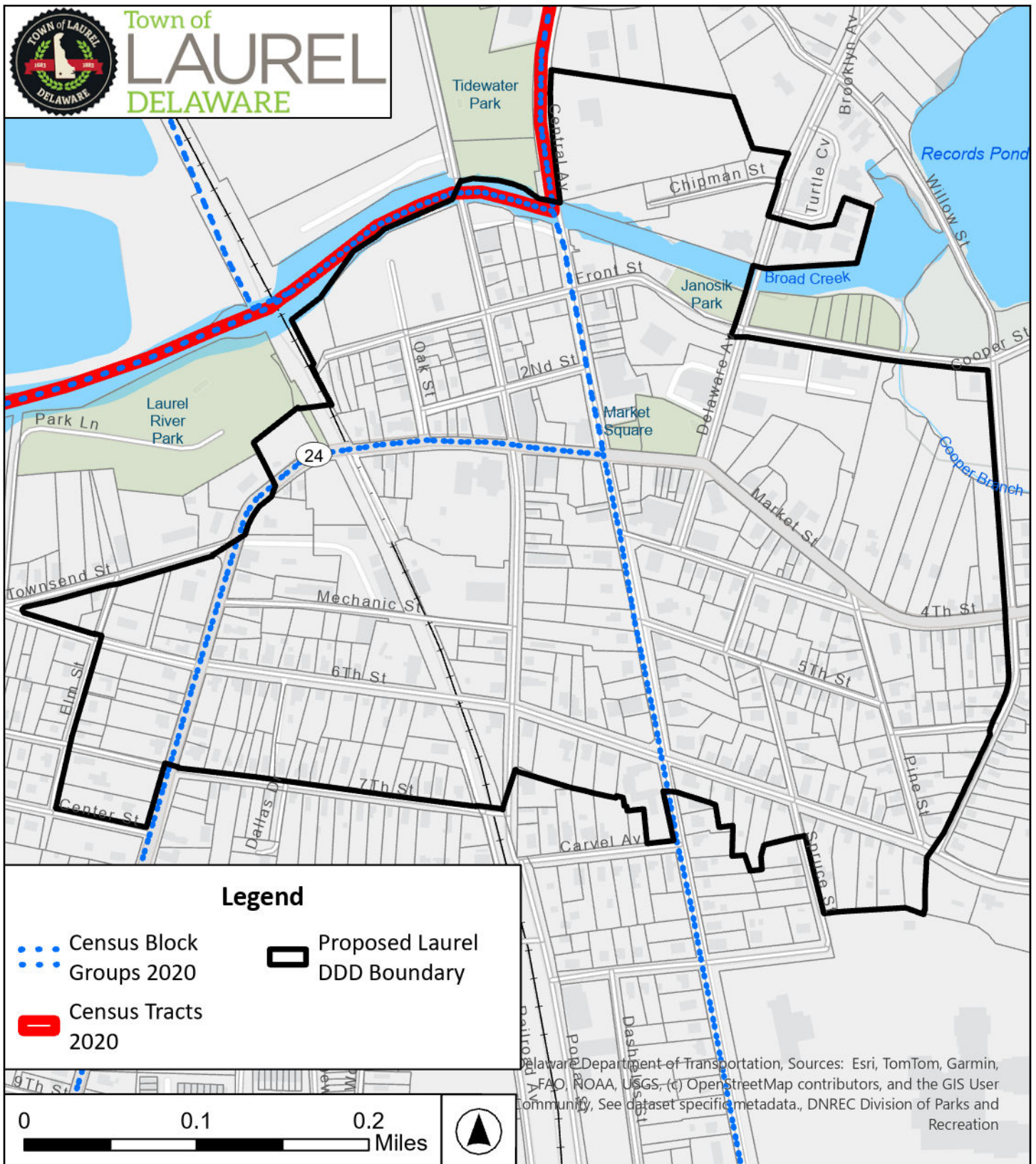
Central Avenue between The Ramble and Market Street.		
Ensure that owners of larger homes along Central Avenue and Market Street, who may not be income-qualified for other programs, are aware of the Historic Tax Credit and other options.	Ongoing	Town, LRC, Milford Housing
Secure low-interest loan availability from community lenders such as NCALL.	Complete	Town, NeighborGood
Adopt an ordinance that requires absentee landlords who have a local property management company with whom tenants and the town can communicate.	Not Started	Town Council, Town Planning and Zoning Commission
With increased attention to absentee landlords, provide assurances that tenants are not improperly displaced or subjected to unfair rent increases.	No Longer Relevant	Town Council, Town Planning and Zoning Commission
Ensure that town codes are consistently enforced.	Ongoing	Town Council, Town Planning and Zoning Commission
Consider ordinances permitting accessory dwelling units and short-term rental such as Air BnB.	No Longer Relevant	Town Council, Town Planning and Zoning Commission
Category 4: Protect Laurel's Most Valuable Natural Asset		
Align the permitted uses within the Marine Resources district with its stated purpose in the zoning ordinance (Category 1).	Complete	Town Council, Town Planning and Zoning Commission
Make The Ramble a model of sustainable, low-impact development practices and perhaps a "credit bank" to offset development projects elsewhere in Laurel.	Ongoing	LRC, DNREC, Town

Ensure that the cottages are built to superior design standards with at least a “net-zero” impact on water quality in Broad Creek.	Ongoing	LRC
Construct the various proposed green infrastructure techniques proposed by ForeSite Associates along the length of The Ramble.	Complete	LRC, DNREC
Continue to partner with DNREC to identify sources of funding green stormwater installations through The Ramble.	Ongoing	LRC, DNREC
Ensure that, as planned, new development avoids the floodplain.	Ongoing	Town Council, Town Planning and Zoning Commission
Maintain and grow Laurel’s tree canopy, setting a goal in the Comprehensive Plan update.	Ongoing	DNREC, Town
Adopt a goose-control program (see “Broad Creek to the Chesapeake” report).	Not Started	Town, Sussex Conservation District
Clean up contaminated sites that are targets of acquisition by the Laurel Redevelopment Corporation.	Ongoing	LRC, DNREC, Town
Adopt landscaping and design standards that protect both the historic character of the area and water quality (Categories 1 and 2).	Ongoing	LRC, Town



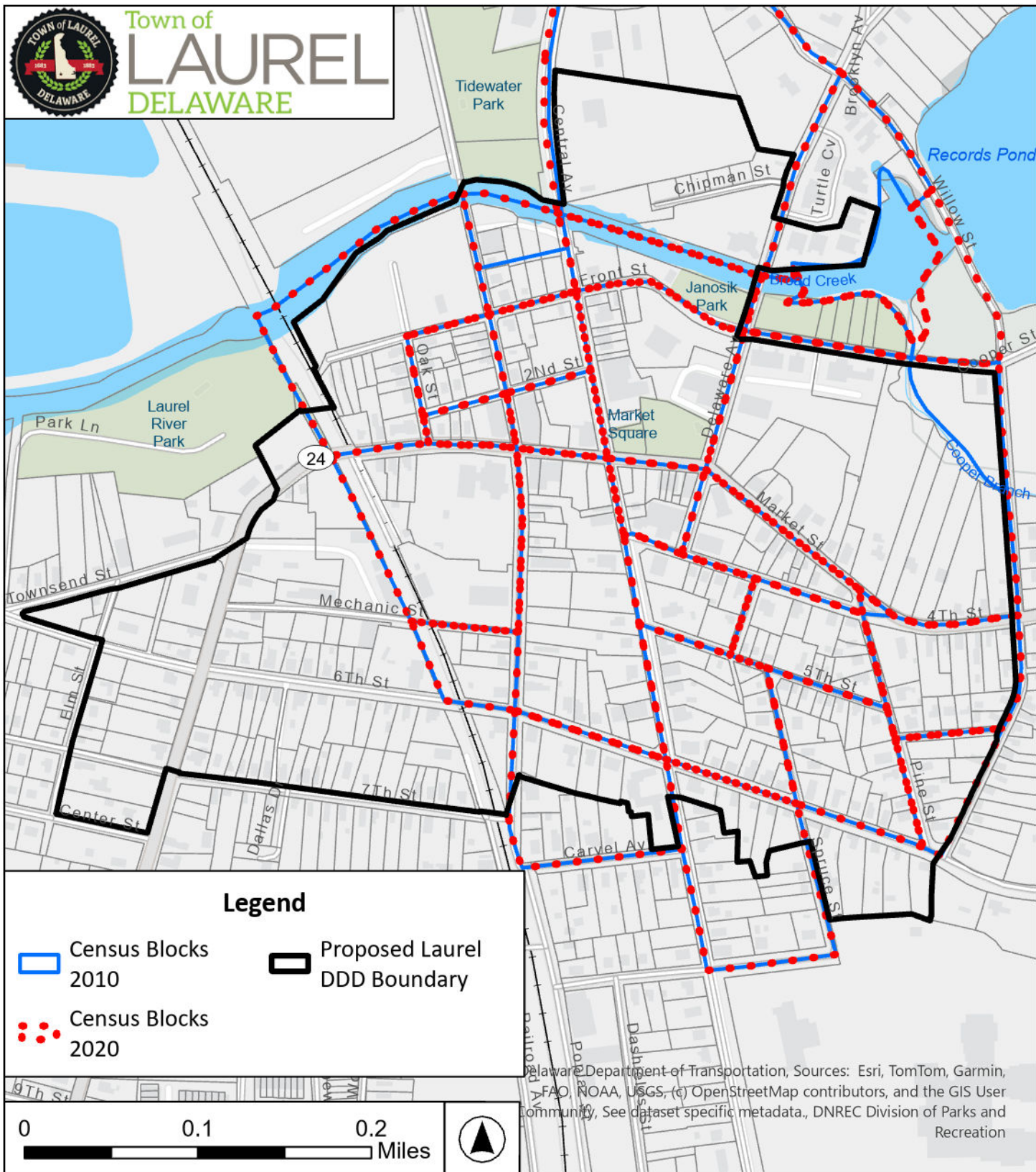
Downtown Development District Project Locations (2025)



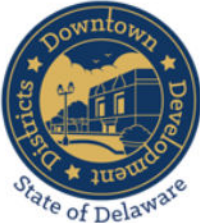


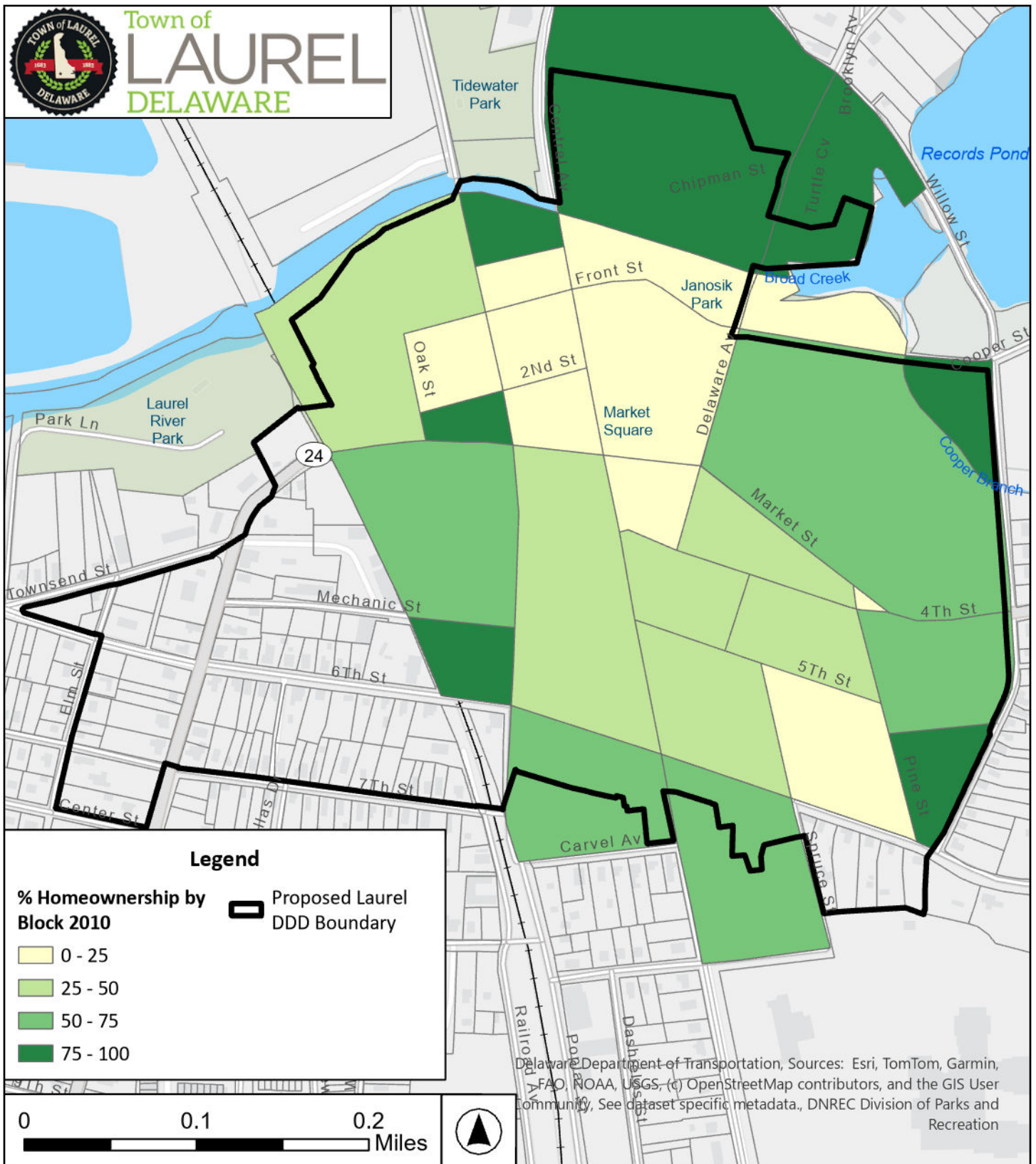
Downtown Development District Percent Census Block Groups and Tracts 2020





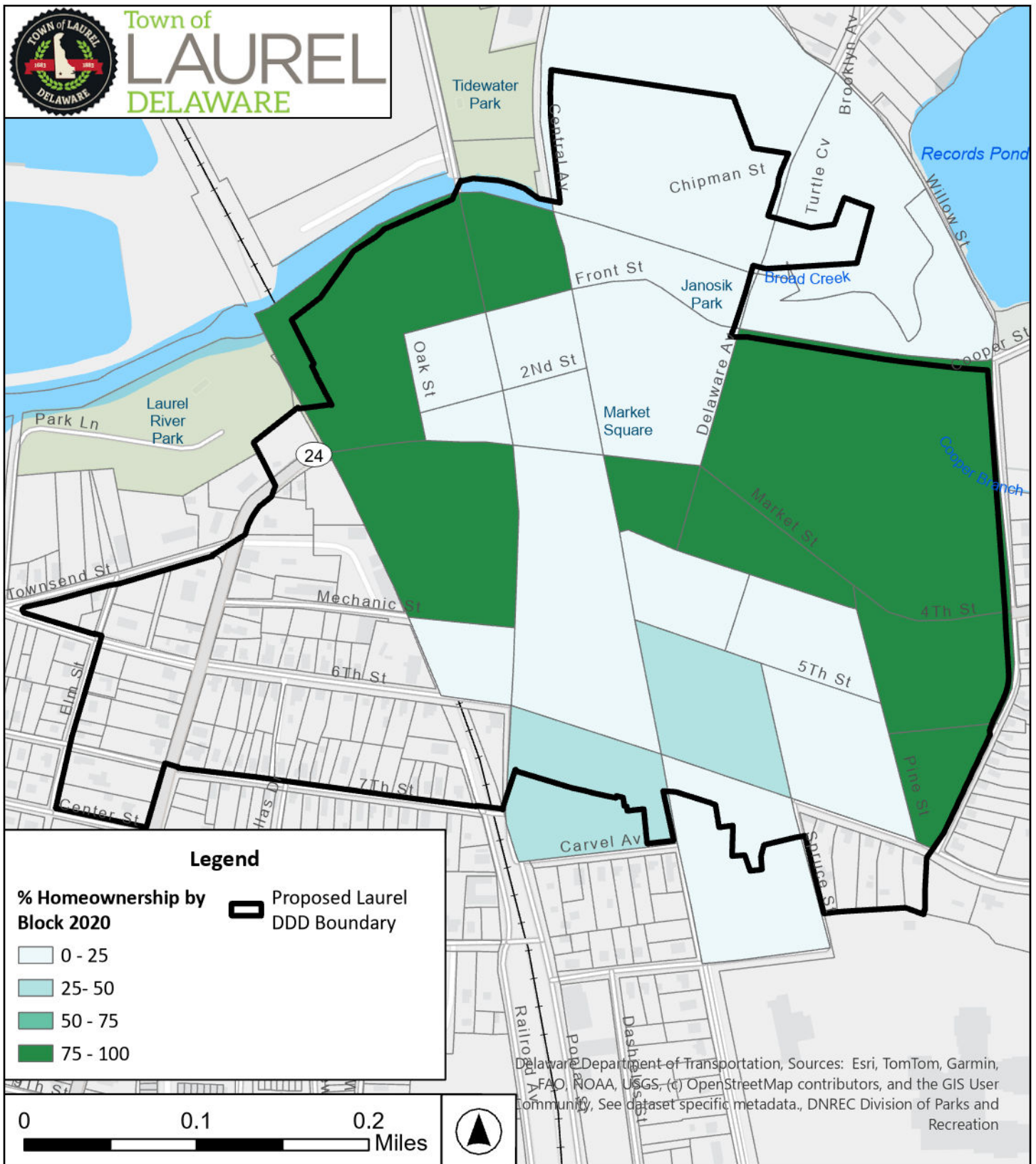
Downtown Development District Percent Census Blocks 2010 and 2020





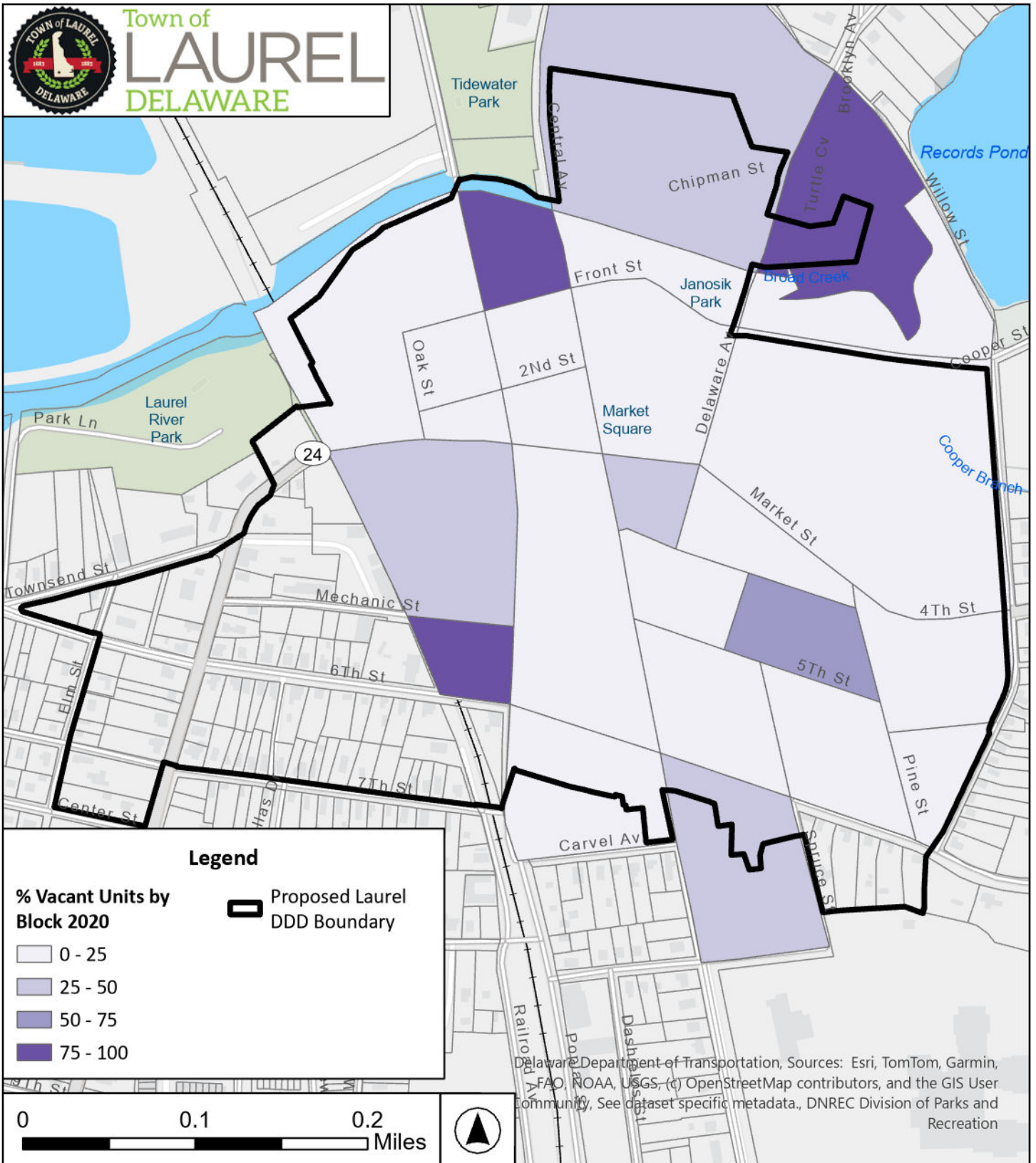
Downtown Development District Percent Homeownership (2010)





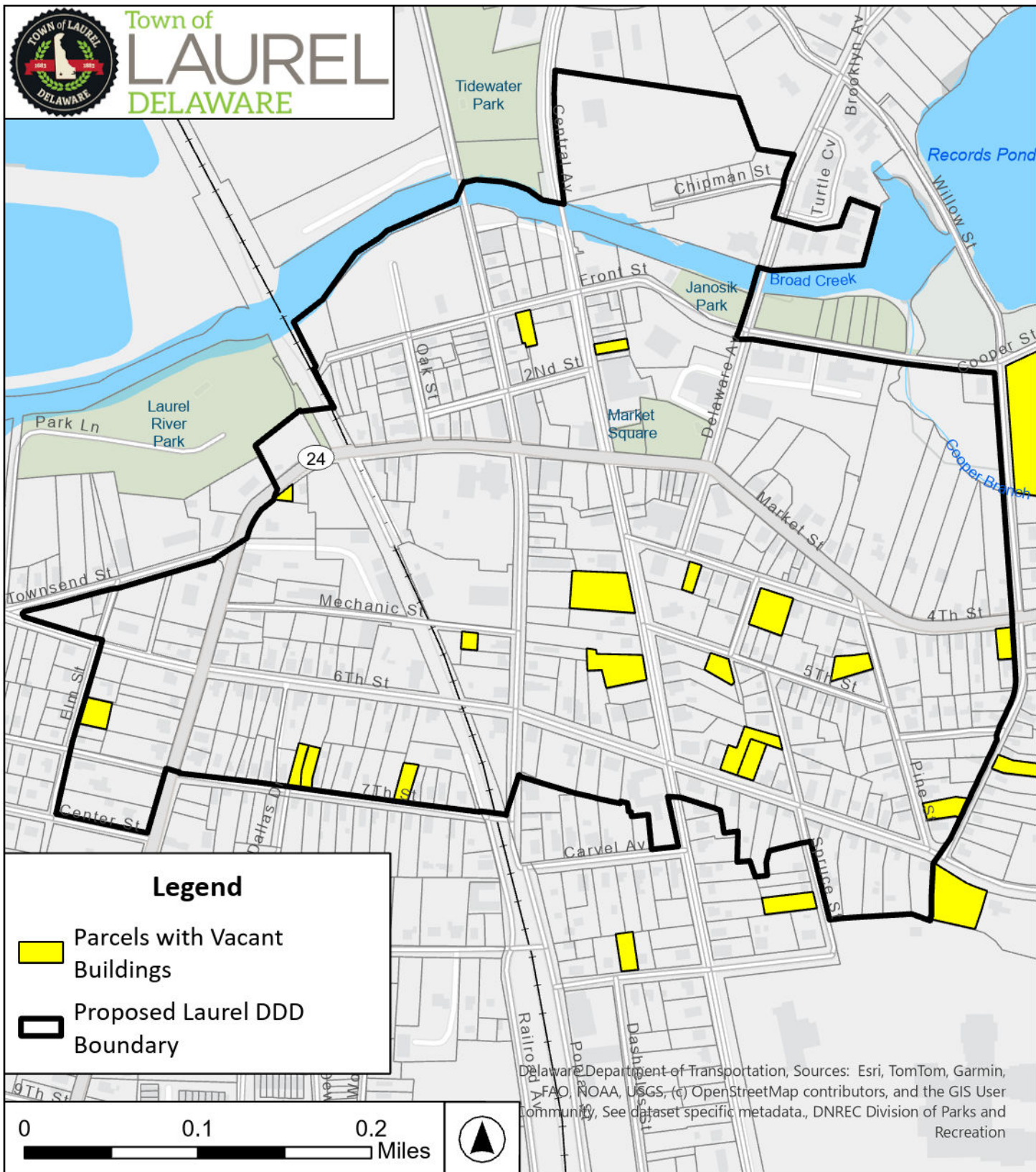
Downtown Development District Percent Homeownership (2020)





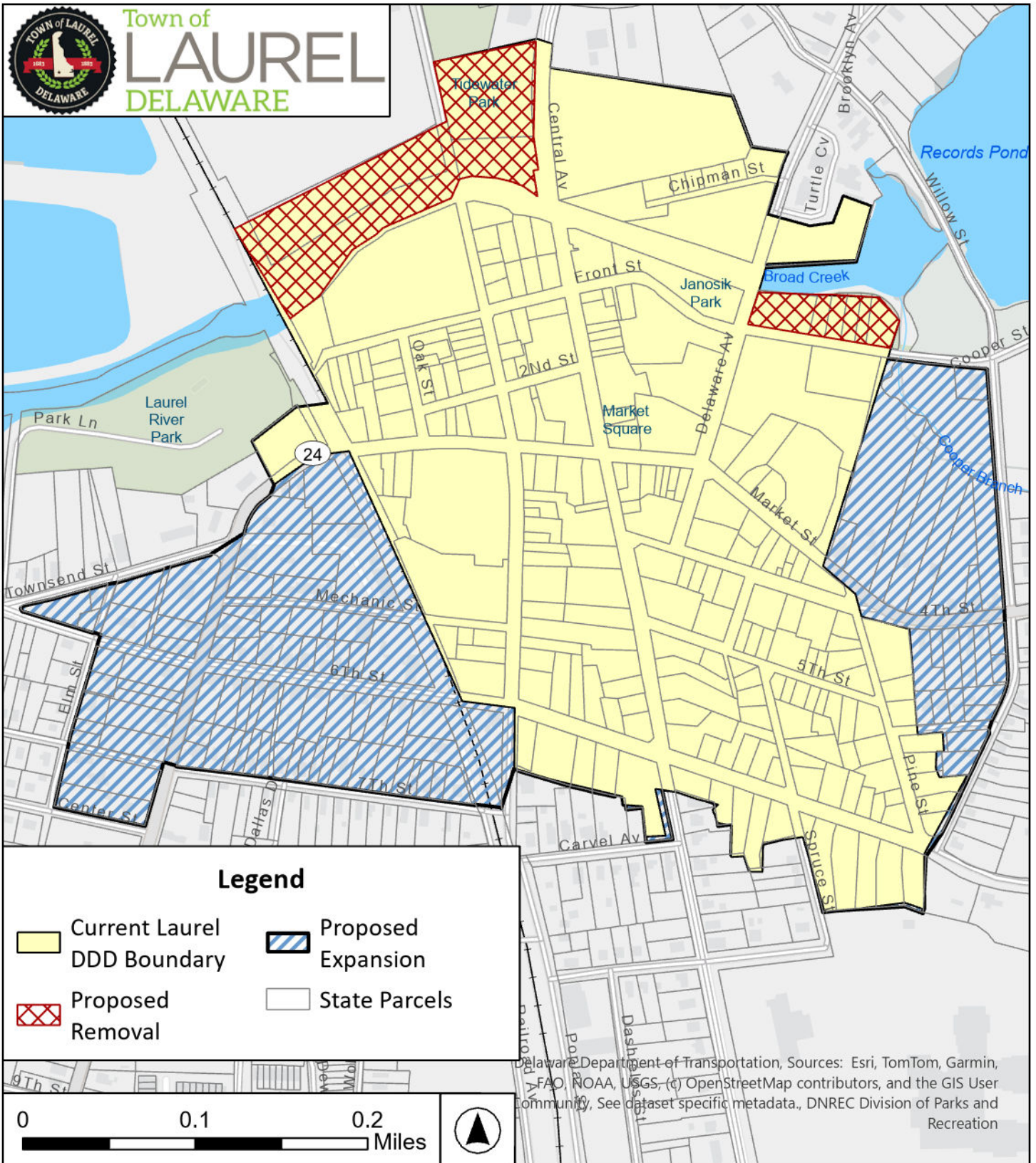
Downtown Development District Percent Vacant Units (2020)





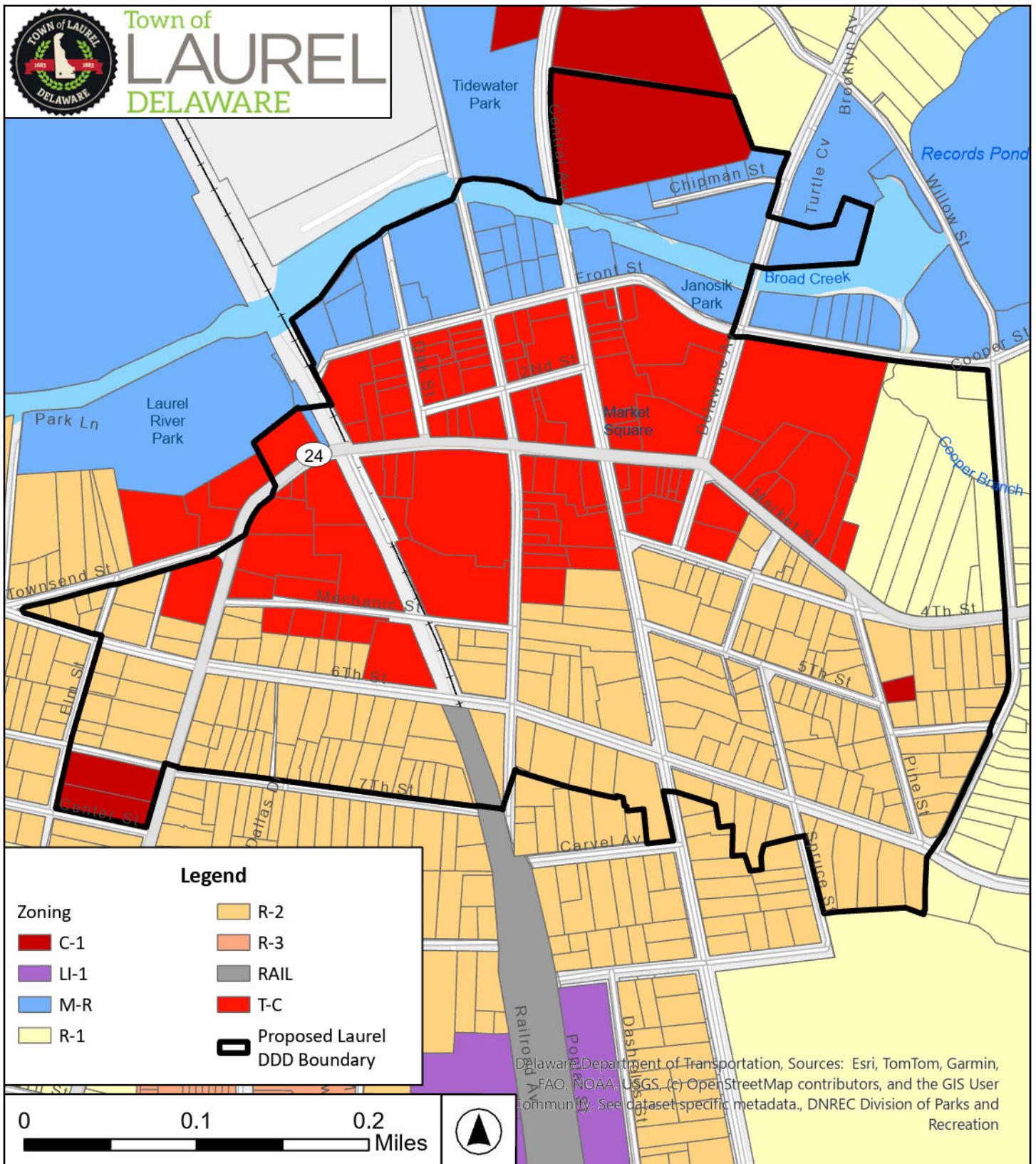
Downtown Development District Vacant Building Locations





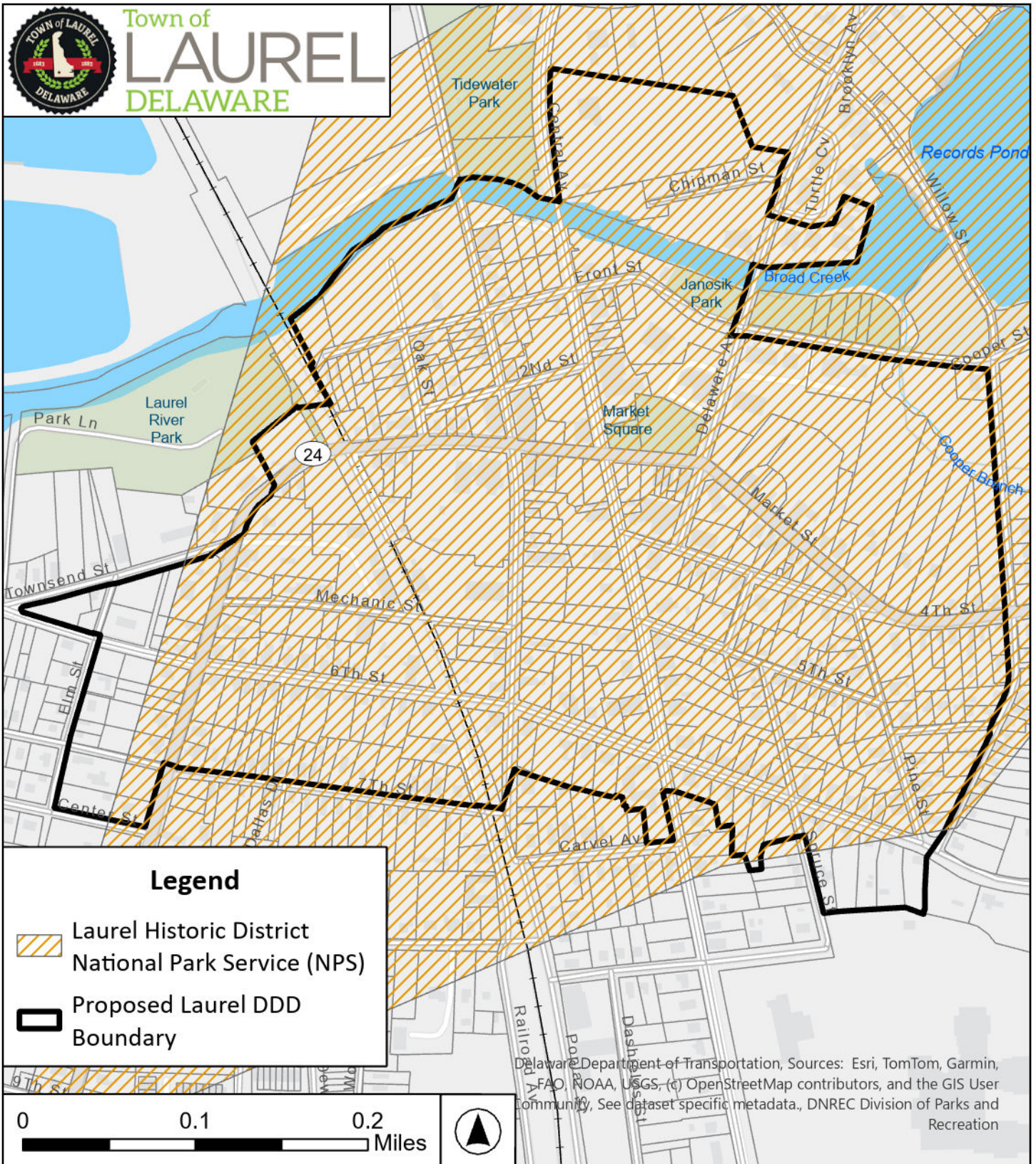
Downtown Development District Proposed Boundary





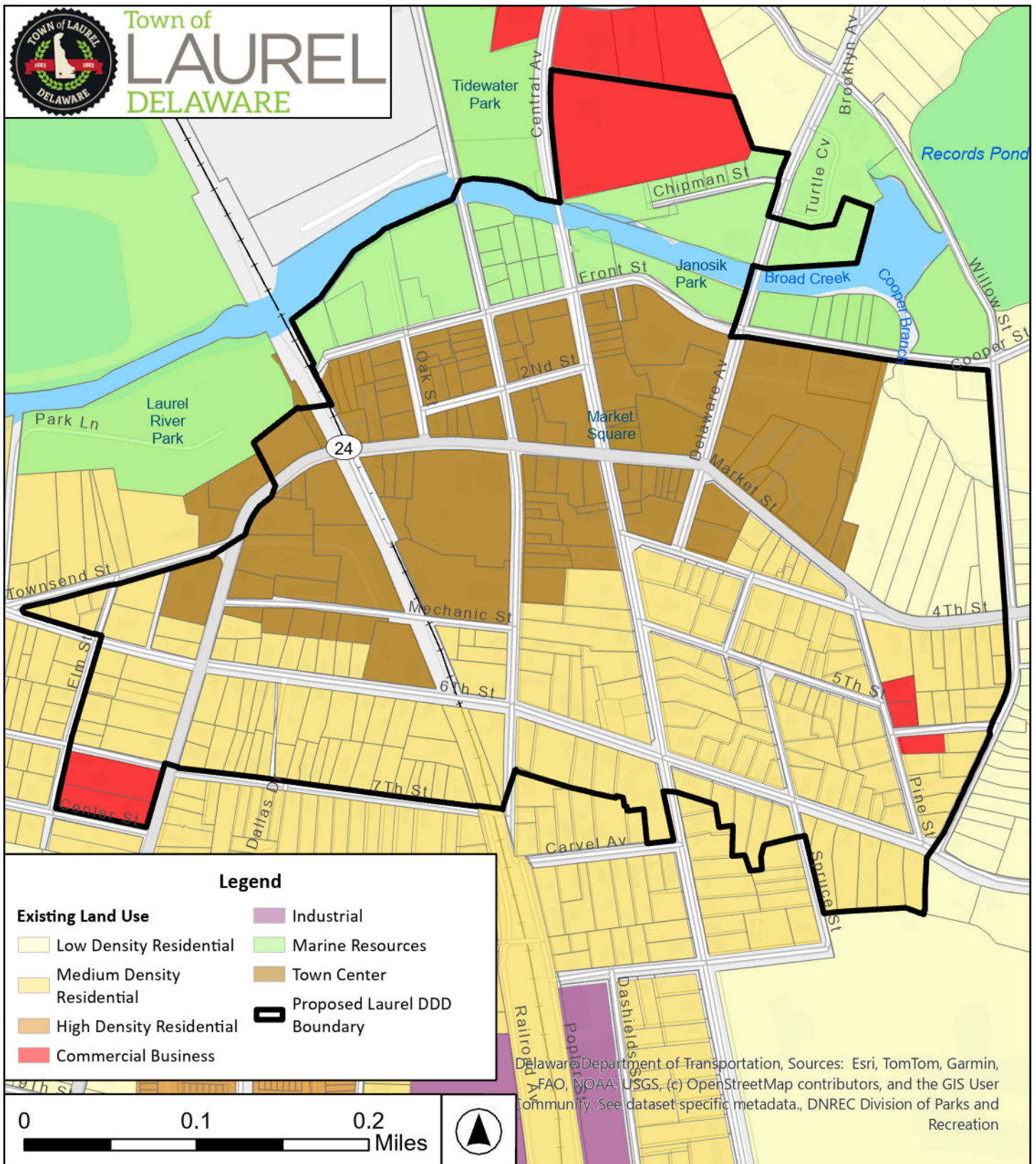
Downtown Development District Zoning (2025)





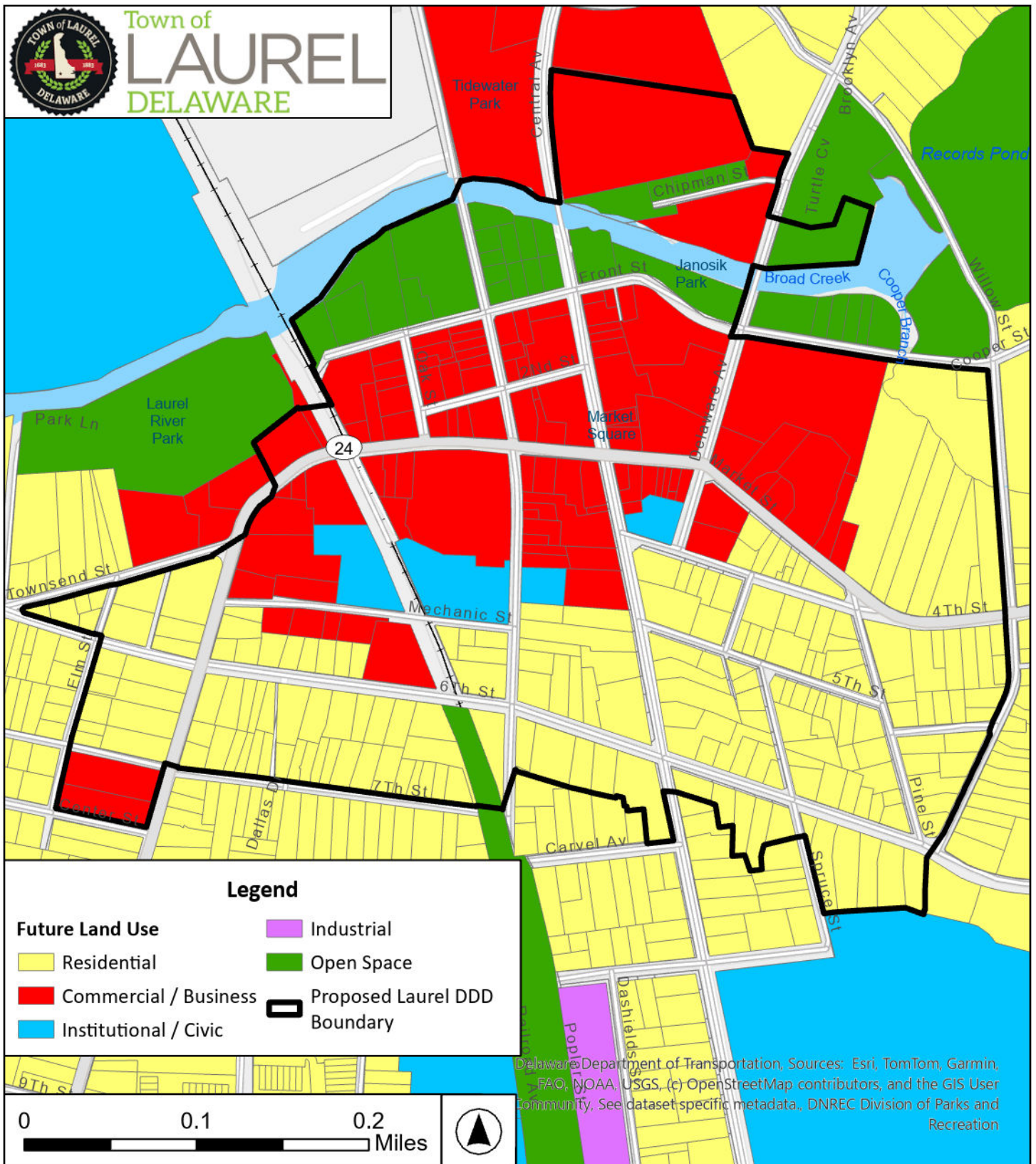
Downtown Development District Historic District (NPS)





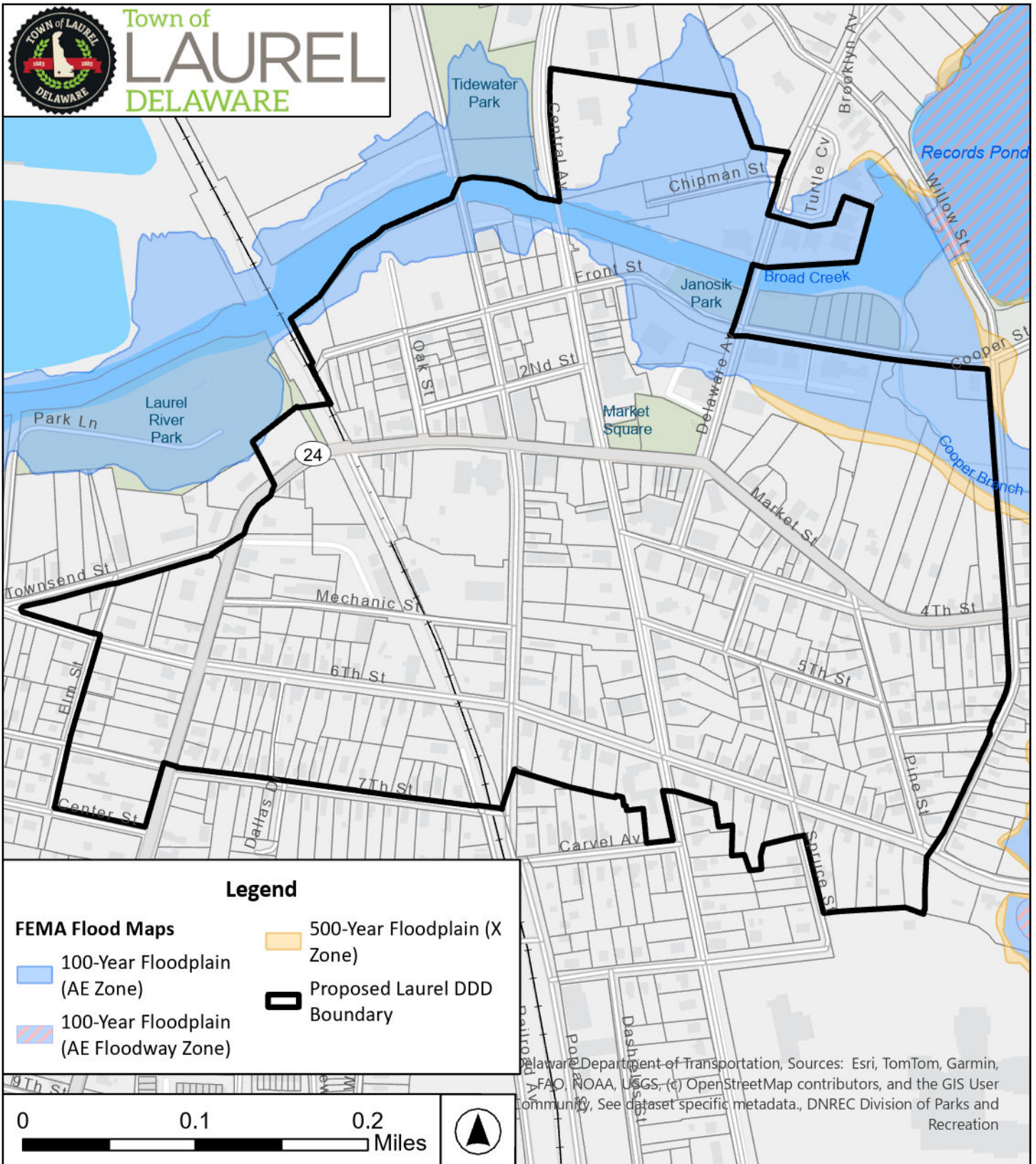
Downtown Development District Current Land Use (2018 Comprehensive Development Plan)





Downtown Development District Future Land Use (2018 Comprehensive Development Plan)





Downtown Development District FEMA Floodplains

