

COMMUNITY CHARACTER

Introduction

The history, architecture, and visual landscape of Mardela Springs create a unique identity for this Eastern Shore town. Mardela Springs' physical, natural, and socio-economic characteristics significantly contribute to the quality of life valued by its residents. The Town's history and unique identity can be kept alive through education and preservation, both of which can take many forms and vary in intensity. The past is a building block for the future and, if a plan is to be comprehensive, it must incorporate that past as a key element of planning for the future.

Community Character Goal

The overall goal of the Community Character Element is to establish guiding principles to promote, protect, and enhance the historic and cultural resources that uniquely define the community.

Historic Preservation

Historic preservation is a program which involves the inventorying, researching, restoration, and ongoing protection of sites and structures having a significant local or national historic interest. Continued historic and cultural resource preservation and enhancement through sensitive land use planning and other administrative means would provide Mardela Springs with a number of benefits including:

- Promotion of a strong sense of community pride for Town residents;
- Community revitalization through the renovation or adaptive reuse of older structures;
- Increased property values and tax revenues as a result of renovation and restoration; and
- Increased revenues generated from tourism.

There are a number of structures and sites around and within the Town that are of historic, cultural, or architectural significance. These

structures, given proper concern and recognition, have tremendous potential to serve as physical reminders of the history and heritage of the past.

In recent years, there has been considerable public concern that the vestiges of our heritage will be irretrievably lost. It has been found that an active historic and architectural preservation program could have beneficial social, economic, and aesthetic impacts on an area. Therefore, rather than permit demolition, destruction, or abandonment of our rich heritage, an active historic preservation program is recommended. Such a program should permit the continued use of the identified sites and structures while simultaneously discouraging inappropriate exterior alterations. The development of a Historic Preservation Program for Mardela Springs should be the result of a cooperative effort between the public and private sectors of the community.

The following programs and strategies are designed to facilitate achieving this Plan's goal of preserving and enhancing the Town's rich cultural and historic heritage.

Inventory of Historical Structures

The Town should fully identify significant historic structures and sites within its corporate limits. Once all sites have been identified, there are a number of actions the Town can take to ensure that these cultural resources are preserved for future generations.

To date, the following have been identified as significant historic structures and/or sites of particular interest to the Town of Mardela Springs (See Map #9):

- The Brattan-Taylor-Truitt House;
- Emmanuel M.P. Church;
- The Adkins Historical and Museum Complex to include the Brattan-Taylor country store, Odd Fellows lodge, Gravenor-English one-room schoolhouse, livery stable, Young's Purchase farmhouse, doctor's office, memorial building, the cannery / warehouse, a Victorian home, an outhouse, the Rockawalkin rail

- freight station, and the base portion of a Transpeninsular Line marker;
- Eunity Elderdice House;
 - Levin A. Wilson House;
 - First Pilgrim Holiness Church;
 - First Baptist Church;
 - The Barren Creek Springs Presbyterian Church, a National Register site;
 - The Mardela Springs (Barren Creek) Spring House; and,
 - The Mardela Springs Fire House.

Other sites in the vicinity of Mardela Springs, but outside of the corporate limit, have also been identified as significant historic structures and/or sites of particular interest, to include:

- First Baptist Church of Athol;
- Bennett-Adkins Farm;
- Double Mills;
- Mt. Pleasant U.M. Church;
- White Chimneys;
- Snethen Methodist Church; and,
- The Mason-Dixon Corner Marker

Protection and Preservation Programs

A number of programs exist that provide assistance in protection or preservation, offer tax benefits, and provide professional historical and/or architectural consulting. More detailed information on existing programs including the National Historic Landmark, National Register of Historic Places, conservation and preservation easements, and historic overlay districts can be found from various preservation

organizations such as the Maryland Historical Trust, Wicomico County Historic District Commission, Maryland Association of Historic District Commissions, and Preservation Maryland.

National Register of Historic Places

In 1966, Congress established the National Register of Historic Places as the Federal Government's official list of properties, including districts, significant in American history and culture. In Maryland, the Register is administered by the Maryland Historical Trust. Some benefits resulting from a listing in the National Register include the following:

- National recognition of the value of historic properties individually and collectively to the Nation;
- Eligibility for federal tax incentives and other preservation assistance;
- Eligibility for a Maryland income tax benefit for the approved rehabilitation of owner-occupied residential buildings; and,
- Consideration in the planning for federally and state assisted projects.

Listing does not interfere with a private property owner's right to alter, manage, or dispose of property.

The Maryland Historic Trust

The Maryland Historic Trust (MHT) is an agency of the Maryland Department of Planning and the State Historic Preservation Office. The MHT surveys historic buildings, structures, and archaeological sites to determine eligibility of being listed on the State register. As with being on the National Register of Historic Places, listing does not limit or regulate the property owner in what can or cannot be done with the property. In order to be considered for listing on the National Register or having an easement on the property to be accepted by the MHT, the site usually must first be listed on the Maryland Historical Trust Register. The MHT administers the following three programs related to research, survey, and registration:

- Maryland Inventory of Historic Properties is a broad-based catalog of historic resources throughout the State. The inventory consists of written, photographic, cartographic, and other graphic documentation of over 140,000 historic districts, buildings, structures, and sites that serve as a physical record of Maryland history. The inventory is constantly expanding through contributions from the Trust's State-wide Architectural Survey Program, which works with county and local governments and other institutions to identify and document historic resources. Listing in the inventory does not limit or regulate the property owner in what can or cannot be done with the property.
- Maryland Register of Historic Places consists of those Maryland resources listed in the National Register and those that the MHT Director determines are significant to the prehistory or history, upland and underwater archeology, architecture, engineering, or culture of Maryland and therefore are eligible for listing in the National Register.
- National Register of Historic Places recognizes districts, buildings, structures, objects, and sites for the significance in American history, archeology, architecture, engineering, or culture, and identifies them as worthy of preservation. Listing in the National Register honors the property by recognizing its importance to its community, State, or to the Nation and confers a measure of protection from harm by federal activities. Federal agencies whose projects affect a property listed in or determined eligible for the National Register must give the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation an opportunity to comment on the project and its effects on the property. Listing or eligibility for listing in the National Register is a prerequisite for receiving MHT capital grants, easement donation, and eligibility for commercial and residential tax credits at the State and federal level.

The MHT administers Maryland state income tax credits for rehabilitation projects on both commercial and residential properties. The MHT also administers federal rehabilitation tax credits for commercial properties in coordination with the National Park Service. These tax credits would be useful in achieving many of the revitalization goals of Mardela Springs. In addition, the MHT offers non-capital grants that can be used for survey and inventory

projects, design guidelines, and technical assistance for creating and administering a local historic district.

Maryland Historic Preservation Easement

A State-held historic preservation easement monitored by the MHT is an excellent means of perpetually preserving a historical structure and property for future generations. Such easements run with the land and transfer to future owners. The benefits for a property owner to donate his land to the MHT may include income, estate, inheritance, gift, and property tax benefits. In exchange, the owner gives the MHT the right to review and approve proposed alterations on the property. The MHT will only accept easements on properties it determines to be eligible for listing in the National Register.

Local Historic Overlay Zone

Another type of designation is the locally-zoned historic district which is an overlay on the existing zoning ordinance of a specified area. This district, legally allowed by Section 8.01 of Article 66B in the Annotated Code of Maryland, is designed in order to maintain the visual character of the community. It may allow an appointed Commission to monitor changes, alterations, and demolition of buildings and structures of architectural or historic significance. The main purpose of such zoning is:

- To safeguard the heritage by preserving the districts that reflect elements of its cultural, social, economic, political or architectural history;
- To stabilize or improve property values in such a district;
- To foster civic beauty;
- To strengthen the local economy; and,
- To preserve Historic Districts for the education, welfare, and pleasure of the residents of the county or municipal corporation.

Adaptive Re-Use

The Town should adopt zoning provisions that promote the adaptive reuse of historic structures for public and private uses including, but not limited to, bed and breakfast establishments, craft/gift shops, museums, and studio space for artisans, when such uses minimize exterior structural alterations.

Support Owners

The Town should encourage, through the use of various incentives, the preservation of historic structures. Include tax incentives for major structural or exterior renovation or the donation of protective historic easements.

Local Historic Districts

The Town may, through the use of various incentives, encourage the establishment of local historic districts in the Town. Incentives may include tax incentives and recognition through the awarding of plaques.

Development Proposal Review

The zoning ordinance and subdivision regulations for the Town should require developers to identify cemeteries/burial grounds/archaeological sites/historical structures on a property prior to any disturbance of the site and support archaeological and historical research through preservation of significant sites.

Community Character Objectives

- (1) Maintain the integrity of existing residential neighborhoods.
- (2) Preserve and protect the Town's historic and cultural resources.

- (3) Protect neighborhoods from the undesirable and adverse impacts of development.
- (4) Encourage development design that reflects the traditional character of the Town.
- (5) Support the development of safe and affordable housing.
- (6) Endorse and promote heritage tourism opportunities.
- (7) Encourage retention of existing businesses, promote the responsible location of new businesses, allow for traditional neighborhood businesses, and encourage business and commercial revitalization.

Community Character Policies

- (1) The Town shall retain, and shall encourage the County to retain; a clear and well-defined edge where growth and development in and around the Town ends, and rural areas begin.
- (2) Transportation projects should be evaluated for impacts on local street traffic and on existing and planned land uses. Transportation projects should not physically divide or otherwise adversely affect established residential neighborhoods.
- (3) Strip commercial development (that which is car-related and placed side-by-side) shall be avoided.
- (4) The review of development proposals will place priority on protection of historic and culturally significant buildings, monuments, and spaces that contribute to the character of the Town.
- (5) The scale, character, number, and location of signs shall be in conformance with the Town's historical character.
- (6) Site designs that retain or create a pedestrian-friendly community shall be encouraged and facilitated.

- (7) All redevelopment and new development shall retain the pattern, scale, and character of the surrounding neighborhood.
- (8) Historic qualities will be developed into the design of new and remodeled housing to maintain the property value of existing historic homes.
- (9) The Town shall retain and acquire adequate public open space to enhance the Town's character and quality of life.
- (10) Town gateways should be easily recognizable and enhanced with appropriate signage and landscaping.
- (11) Development and re-development, both commercial and residential, should be architecturally compatible with existing structures to maintain the historic character of the Town.
- (12) Traditional neighborhood business activities, low impact businesses, and home-based businesses should be encouraged in designated areas of the Town as part of the Town's redevelopment efforts.
- (13) Trees in open spaces should be planted and/or retained.
- (14) Connections to the rural landscape should be maintained by coordinating with the County to encourage protection of farmland and forestland outside of the Town's growth boundary.

Community Character Recommendations

- (1) The Town should provide mechanisms for recognizing and maintaining historical properties to include the development of a Historic District Commission and the creation of a Historic Overlay zoning district that preserves areas, sites, and structures of cultural or historic significance.
- (2) The Town should seek grant funding and pursue other incentives to help maintain historic properties, buildings, and sites.
- (3) The Town should promote educational and cultural opportunities to residents of the Town.

- (4) The Town should continue to work with the County to define its growth area and establish a clear urban versus rural edge.
- (5) The Town's zoning regulations should be streamlined and made more flexible in order to encourage economic growth projects.
- (6) The Town should continue to work with the County to obtain Program Open Space funding to help support recreational and open space projects.
- (7) The Town should adopt landscaping standards that would be applicable to all development.
- (8) The Town should continue to work with the County in the implementation of its Forest Conservation Program.
- (9) The Town should update its sign regulations in order to ensure they are in keeping with the Town's historic character.
- (10) The Town should update its zoning and subdivision regulations to provide additional planning tools to meet the community character goals, objectives, and policies.