

2025 Downtown Development Plan Update:

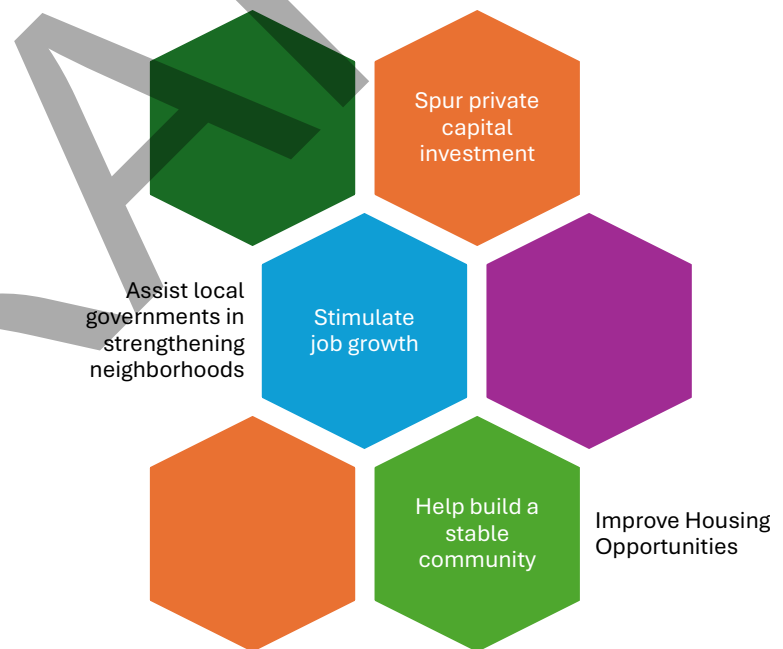
What's new?

Since the last Downtown Development Plan submittal, Georgetown has been actively working to implement the goals and objectives identified for the revitalization of the downtown area. With this update, the Town has taken the time to re-visit some of the previous goals identified, as well as identify some new challenges to continue to help the downtown area grow into a usable space for all residents and stakeholders.

There is still an overall need to improve the public perception of the downtown area. Through stakeholder interviews as well as public outreach for this update, the Town continually heard concerns in reference to homelessness, crime, etc. Working to change the perception that both of those issues are prevalent in the Town will increase the opportunity for community events, and help to draw businesses to the Downtown area in general.

Purpose and Need

People often refer to downtowns as the “heart” of the community. Like a heart, the downtown pumps life and energy into the rest of the city or town. Busy streets and sidewalks, creative store fronts and colorful streetscapes all help contribute to the character and vibrancy of downtowns. It is critical to cities and towns that they continuously make improvements to their downtowns to ensure the “heart” of their community is always thriving and lively. To help our downtowns and neighborhoods become more dynamic and vibrant places, the Delaware General Assembly enacted the Downtown Development Districts Act in 2014, which helps our cities and towns create designated areas that can then qualify them for significant development incentives and other State benefits. The Town of Georgetown is seeking to renew its Downtown Development District (DDD) designation as an integral component to its comprehensive economic, housing and community development initiatives.





Georgetown originally received a Neighborhood Building Blocks Fund Grant in 2015 to develop a DDD Plan, in order to one day apply for State designation under this program. The grant, funded by a JP Morgan Chase settlement agreement, awarded \$45,000 to Georgetown to engage a planning consultant and prepare its first District Plan, and in pursuit of its renewal. The District Plan identifies needs, challenges and opportunities within the designated downtown, establishes a shared vision and goals for the downtown, and recommends development strategies and incentives to achieve this vision. The planning process for the Plan included an extensive stakeholder and public outreach process.

Georgetown's downtown has strong bones, rich in history with the capacity and infrastructure to absorb growth. The amount of planning documents and efforts speaks volumes about the Town's design expectations in the area as well as its political will to cultivate positive and context sensitive change. Since its initial DDD designation, the Town has invested in planning studies and actions that address downtown development, including the 2021 Comprehensive Plan, East Market Street Design Standards, Historic District Study Committee, Downtown Façade Improvement Program, and the Branding Initiative and Beautification Efforts Improvement Program. The Town has also made many public investments in the downtown including, but not limited to: improving public spaces such as Wilson Park and developing the Town's first public playground on North King Street, beautifying the streetscapes such as tree plantings and sidewalk upgrades along Market Street, and improving pedestrian safety and mobility such as crosswalks and signage around the Circle, and repairing the Circle Fountain.

While the Town has set forth great energy and taken many steps forward, the downtown still faces many challenges. These challenges first include creating the right mix of uses and promoting day and night economic activity. As the Sussex County Seat the Town consists of mostly weekday daytime activity resulting from the courthouse and government employment. The Town desires to create a more vibrant, 24-hour community where people stay after work to dine, shop and recreate. The downtown would benefit from a wider range of options to engage community residents after hours. It is difficult for a business to be more successful if it is not open during the hours when most people have free time – evenings and weekends.

Second, the downtown struggles to compete with the commercial retail along the Route 113 corridor. This was a common theme heard during the initial DDD Plan designation and continues to be a concern with the submittal of the renewal.

In addition to providing a mix of pedestrian-oriented uses, a third challenge is to improve the physical walking environment. Many times throughout the day it is difficult to cross Market Street, Bedford Street and the Circle. This contributes to discouraging a person from visiting multiple businesses and discourages persons employed in the downtown from visiting businesses over their lunchtime and after work.



Other challenges and needs include reducing the amount and perception of crime within the District area, providing the appropriate amount of parking in strategic locations, enhancing gateways and maintaining the Town's unique historic character. The Town further desires to physically and culturally connect adjacent neighborhoods with minimal adverse impact, as well as promote economic and social diversity within the downtown area.

Benefits

The Town District Plan and DDD designation will result in an additional mix of uses, beautifying the streetscape, and marketing and stimulating economic activity. A live-work-play community requires a mix of residential, retail, service and entertainment uses. Market, economic and social diversity will create a more vibrant place and strengthen the downtown's market position. DDD designation will promote and incentivize infill development of prime vacant and underutilized lands in key locations in the downtown which will in turn be a catalyst to spur redevelopment and physical improvements elsewhere in the District and surrounding neighborhoods.

Designation will help leverage and 'make the case' for other funding opportunities for private and public projects that improve the downtown aesthetic and function, as well as public health and safety. Improvements would make the streets more pedestrian friendly and beautify the public realm generating street activity and foot traffic. Pedestrian activity means more visits to downtown establishments, and puts more 'eyes on the street' creating a safer and more comfortable environment. Such physical improvements may include new street amenities with tree plantings, pedestrian scale lighting, or street furniture such as benches and trash/ recycling receptacles. They may also include façade improvements with creative window displays and signage, or adaptive reuse and restoration of underutilized buildings with historical and/or architectural value.

In addition, marketing, promotion and additional downtown branding efforts are needed to encourage local residents, employees, and visitors to regularly visit downtown businesses and community events. Businesses need to be organized and set forth joint promotions, advertising, marketing and special events. Through designation the Town would also be able to better focus on business recruitment and investment incentives, while maintaining an inventory of available business space and publicizing commercial opportunities.

In short, Downtown Development District designation by the State will be a catalyst for public and private investments. Designation will assist to make the entire District, and strategic sites in the downtown, market-ready, and attract and incentivize private capital investment by entitling private construction projects to receive grants and other local incentives. While designation is not guaranteed, this District Plan will be used as the



primary tool to not just stimulate economic activity within the downtown, but to also guide this activity through strategic, efficient and sound investments.

District Planning Process

Stakeholders and Partnerships

Town of Georgetown

The Town will continue to work to promote the District Plan, administer the incentives and work on completing the strategies put forth in the Plan. The Plan can be used as a tool to support the reasons developers and business owners should come to Georgetown.

Georgetown Chamber of Commerce

The Greater Georgetown Chamber of Commerce is a business corporation dedicated to serving its membership. The non-profit 501(c) (6) is organized to promote and advance the business of its members and, through group effort, expand and improve the economic, physical, and social welfare of the Greater Georgetown area. Member benefits include Chamber referrals, broadcast emailing, networking events, special event sponsorships, ribbon cuttings, monthly newsletter, low-cost advertising, Member2Member program, notary services and more.

Historic Georgetown Association

The Historic Georgetown Association (HGA) was formed in 1993 and included Mayor Joe Booth and several members of the Council, Chamber of Commerce, Georgetown Business Association as well as concerned residents. Some of the many important projects the HGA has worked on include the revitalization of Kimmeytown, restoration of the train station and restoring the Town's first fire house. The organization continues to be active in preserving the history and the Town of Georgetown.

Sussex County Economic Development Office

With the motto: Explore, Excite, Exceed the County's Economic Development Office is the "key business connector in Southern Delaware." The Office works closely with businesses of all sizes including start-ups and businesses looking to expand or relocate. Recruit and retention are two key words the Office focuses on. Every day Sussex County's Economic Development Office is striving to ensure all businesses throughout the County are successful through outreach, support and incentives.



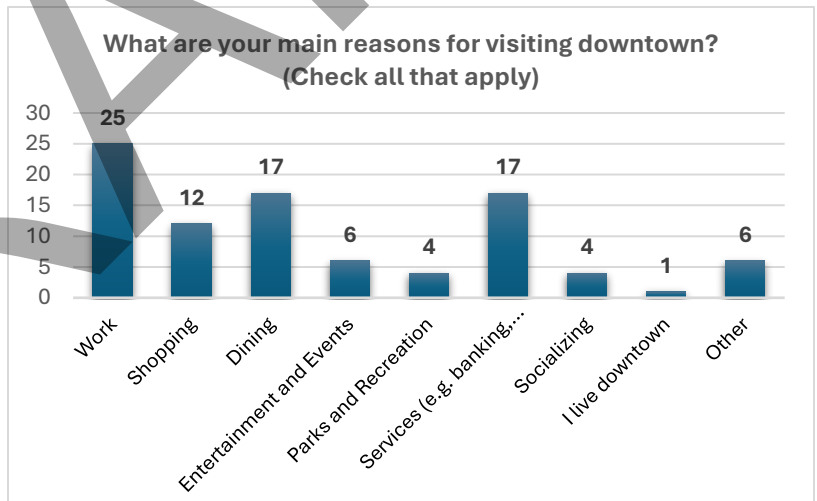
Community Outreach

Community outreach is an important component to the planning process. The opinions of residents, business owners and operators, property owners, downtown employees, and visitors help to identify what they think the important issues are that need to be addressed and how they think Georgetown’s downtown can be improved for the future. In the process of updating the Georgetown Downtown Development District Plan, community outreach has come into play through several Stakeholder Interviews, a community outreach event, as well as a Downtown Survey for both business owners and residents, available in both English and Spanish.

Downtown Development District Survey

This survey was conducted to receive the public’s opinions, experiences, and hopes for the future of the Town center. Twenty-seven (27) questions were asked, and the survey was open until October 31, 2025. A total of 52 completed surveys were received from online and paper copies. Most questions centered around why people travel to downtown, what aspects they value about it, concerns, what changes or improvements are needed, accessibility, livability, sustainability, and what economic development they support.

They survey data showed that most people live outside the downtown area and mostly visited it due to work, dining, or other services, such as visiting their bank or for governmental reasons. Common elements heard through the survey were:



- Lack of available parking.
- Lack of businesses or activities that catch people’s interest.
- Would like to see more green space, landscaping, and parks.
- Would like a greater variety of shops, businesses, and restaurants.
- Upgrade sidewalks and improve connectivity/multi-modal forms of travel within the Town.
- Preservation of the character and historic buildings within the Town.
- Congestion issues and lack of traffic calming measures.
- More affordable housing/availability of housing for all age groups.
- More security, lighting, and police presence to make it feel safer at night.

- Concern with the rising rate of homelessness within the Town.
- Local business support and encouragement is very important to the Town.

Downtown Development District Business Survey

A business-related survey was also conducted to receive the local business owner’s opinions, experiences, and hopes for the future of the businesses within the Town center. Ten (10) questions were asked, and the survey was open from September 10 to October 31, 2025. A total of 3 completed surveys were received from online and paper copies. Most questions centered around the overall experience of owning a business in Town, accessibility to their business, business challenges, and how Georgetown could improve business support/incentives. Overall, existing business owners feel like owning a business downtown is a positive experience. Common elements from responses were:



Challenges with Parking



Need more variety in regards to shops



Lack of foot traffic due to safety concerns



Need for an expansion of the Development District

Existing Documents

Comprehensive Plan

Georgetown’s Comprehensive Plan, adopted in 2021, recommends major policies regarding the development and conservation of the Town and adjacent areas over the next decade. It sets out an overall vision for the Town, where Georgetown is a destination showcasing small town charm, historical prominence, cultural diversity and excellence in educational facilities. The Town will continue to be the heart of Sussex County’s legislative



and judicial activity. It will remain a great place to live, work, learn, shop and play, with affordable homes and a strong sense of community. The underlying vision throughout the Comprehensive Plan is to protect vital resources, improve the quality of life for residents and provide new commercial services to the area, especially those that are not already offered in Sussex County.

The overall goal of the Comprehensive Plan is to continually strive to make Georgetown partner with the community to deliver excellent service, and plan for the future while preserving, protecting, and enhancing the quality of life. To help further achieve this overarching goal, the Plan lists 15 goals under a series of topics with specific recommendations, many of which are applicable to the Downtown Development District. Applicable goals fell under the topics of Land Uses and Housing, Community Facilities and Services, Transportation, Natural Features, and Putting the Plan into Action. The Comprehensive Plan also included a series of policies to be considered to strengthen the downtown area.

As part of this Downtown Development District Planning process, the goals and strategies relating to the downtown area were evaluated. Those that are still valid and have not yet been completed have been incorporated into this Plan. This Plan has also augmented the goals and strategies found in the 2021 Comprehensive Plan and set forth additional implementation strategies aimed at creating the vision outlined in this Plan's Downtown Vision.

An updated comprehensive plan will be developed in 2026. The 2021 Comprehensive Plan can be found on the Town's website.

Other Planning Initiatives

- 2017 Cool & Connected: Leveraging Broadband...Actions and Strategies for Georgetown
- 2018 Walkability Study
- 2018 Georgetown Roadmap Report
- 2020 Downtown Dining Case Study
- 2021 Comprehensive Plan
- 2025 Georgetown Bicycle and Pedestrian Study

State Strategies

Every five years, the Delaware Governor approves an update of the Strategies for State Policies and Spending, originally approved in 1999. The strategies represent a combination of state and local land use policies intended to guide State agencies as they make investment decisions. Throughout the successive updates to the Strategies, the District and the majority of the Georgetown remain within Level 1. Designated Level 1 identifies areas that are most prepared for growth and where the State can make the most cost-



effective infrastructure investment for schools, roads and public safety. The State Strategies generally prioritize the most intense State investments in and around municipalities such as Georgetown. These areas typically provide an opportunity for contiguous development that should grow consistently with historic character. The State encourages new development and reinvestment in these areas.

Zoning Regulations and Design Standards

The Town has been proactive in progressing downtown redevelopment by promoting pedestrian-oriented and placemaking principles, and retaining and attracting neighborhood scale businesses.

In general, the mix of zoning districts within the Downtown permit a wide range of uses that is conducive toward creating a vibrant, traditional mixed-use and walkable downtown. However, some permitted uses are antiquated or may be unsuitable for a downtown. Previous planning efforts have recommended prohibiting uses that may have an adverse effect in achieving the desired downtown character, such as “drive-thrus” and auto-oriented business. The Comprehensive Plan recommends that pedestrian-oriented uses be encouraged in the downtown, including retail sales, personal services, offices and restaurants. With few exceptions, the zoning requirements in the District zones generally allow an overall density, rhythm and scale that are typical of traditional downtowns. A more detailed description and assessment of the zoning districts within the downtown are provided in Section 2 District Existing Conditions.

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