

# Governor Markell Signs Bill to Revitalize Urban Areas, Spur Economic Development

*Law creates plan proposed in State of the State to designate  
Downtown Development Districts*

**Dover, DE** – Joined by community leaders, legislators, and local officials from all 3 counties, Governor Markell signed [Senate Bill 191](#) today to establish economic development incentives that promote revitalization of Delaware’s downtowns.

First proposed in the Governor’s State of the State address in January, SB 191 allows for the creation of Downtown Development Districts – a small number of areas in cities in towns that would qualify for significant development incentives and other state benefits. Senators Margaret Rose Henry (D-Wilmington East), Brian Bushweller (D-Dover), and Robert Marshall (D-Wilmington West), as well as Representatives Helene Keeley (D-Wilmington South), Stephanie Bolden (D-Wilmington), and Darryl Scott (D-Dover) were the prime sponsors of the bill, which passed unanimously in the General Assembly after receiving support from various municipalities and community organizations.

“Across the country, people from all walks of life are re-discovering our cities and towns as places where they want to live, work, start a business, and raise a family,” said Governor Markell. “This urban resurgence is beginning to happen in Delaware as well—but it could use a ‘shot in the arm.’ It is my hope that this innovative new program to revitalize our downtowns will bring much-needed energy and resources to areas of our state that have been overlooked for too long.”



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Through the new program, localities will be able to apply to have a portion of their city, town, or unincorporated area designated as a Downtown Development District (DDD). Applications will be evaluated using three main criteria: (1) need; (2) the quality of the development plan submitted by the applicant; and (3) local incentives offered. Following the initial round of applications, the Governor will select at least 1 but no more than 3 Districts. Under the program, the first 3 Districts must include 1 District in each county. Up to 15 total districts will be able to qualify at one time.

Subject to funding, investors in the selected Districts would be entitled to grants of up to 20 percent of their construction costs. Grants will be available for all types of projects (residential, commercial, and mixed-use), and may be used by for-profit builders and investors, nonprofit organizations, businesses, and homeowners. The grants will be administered by the Delaware State Housing Authority (DSHA).

In addition to the above grants, state agencies will provide additional incentives for qualified activity within Districts. For example, DSHA will offer additional funding to renovate vacant and abandoned houses in DDDs, and several state agencies (including DelDOT) will prioritize work in Districts. In addition, under SB 292, a percentage of the state's existing Historic Preservation Tax Credits will be designated to fund qualifying projects in DDDs, recognizing that this tax credit has been a powerful tool in not only preserving historic structures but also in revitalizing communities.

Further details about Downtown Development Districts are explained in [this fact sheet](#). Additional information about the DDD application process, as well as information about specific program benefits and rules, will be available in the weeks to come.

### **Comments from Legislation's Sponsors:**

“Strong downtowns have the potential to be tremendous catalysts for developing stronger cities across-the-board, but to achieve that, downtowns have to overcome the challenges of aging buildings and infrastructure,” **said Sen. Henry**, the bill’s lead sponsor. “This new law will help marshal the kinds of resources we need to meet those challenges and will encourage the all-important investment and support from the private sector that is needed to make this succeed.”

“We are focused on reenergizing downtown Dover and we’ve made great progress,” **said Sen. Bushweller**. “The program this bill creates provides an additional push and will pay big dividends for communities up and down the state.”

“Our downtowns are the hearts of our communities; they’re what we see in our minds when we think about Wilmington, Dover or Seaford,” **said Rep. Helene Keeley**. “This new law will make sure these essential parts of our cities and towns are vibrant centers of growth we can be proud of.”

“There is a mix of ‘mom and pop’ stores that have been in the neighborhood for years and new businesses popping up that have created a strong energy in the community,” **said Rep. Stephanie T. Bolden**. “There is definitely potential for growth, and we need to maximize on the opportunity to do so.”

“A downtown like Dover’s draws as much from its rich past as it does from its plans for the future, and our history compliments and enriches what we want to see come next,” **said Rep. Scott**. “This initiative is about infusing these historic neighborhoods with fresh ideas and renewed enthusiasm.”