



Streetlights

The Newsletter of the Maryland Downtown Development Association

Promoting the Vitality of Maryland's Downtowns and Traditional Business Districts

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The Value of Paint Analysis for Older Buildings ***By Catherine Masek***

Consider the colors of newly sprouted leaf lettuce, crushed autumn leaves, or the sky on a clear fall day. You may not know it, but these natural and brilliant hues are the true color of our 18th and 19th century architectural past. Unfortunately, on historic homes and commercial structures across the state, these lovely colors have been replaced by shades that are far too glossy and unnatural. Uncovering those original paint colors is a passion of mine and should be of some interest to you too.

Although many don't realize it, studying the layers of historic paint finishes in a building can teach us a great deal about the structure. For example, construction periods and subsequent alterations can be better identified and understood. At one important historic building in Baltimore, the early 19th century Orchard Street Church, an examination of paint finishes led to a new understanding of the various architectural alterations to the building, as well as illuminating rare stenciling work from the late 19th century on the interior of the church.

Studying finishes can also provide insights into the owners' personalities and socioeconomic status. An example of this occurred when Linthicum Walks, a seemingly simple and isolated frame house built in 1775

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Planning Principles for a Vital Downtown

Recently, the Conservation Law Foundation and the Vermont Forum on Sprawl released an informative guidebook entitled "Community rules". The book contains strategy tips for public officials, planners and concerned citizens looking to curb suburban sprawl and reinvigorate older communities. The following is a summary of the book's planning principles for "ensuring a livable and sustainable downtown."

Town Centers Should be Defined as Distinct, Geographical Areas

Town centers are distinctive, in large part, because they are defined areas with a sense of place, history and importance. Planners need to define the boundaries of their town centers in a manner that sets them apart from outlying districts. This can be done in a variety of ways, including adopting new regulations that would establish the center as an historic district or town center district. This would allow for the regulation of land use within the district and better focus development in a direction that furthers a sense of cohesion and a unique identity. This, in turn, enhances the convenience and livability of the downtown area, and helps to avoid the unnecessary suburbanization of surrounding rural lands.

A Vibrant Mix of Land Uses Should be Allowed and Encouraged

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near Crofton, was restored. Paint analysis showed that the original 18th century owner was well aware of current taste and style and used the most expensive imported pigments to paint his secluded home.

It also makes economic sense to analyze the layers of paint in an historic building and return the structure to its original shade. A simple change in paint color from a modern glossy shade to an historically accurate one is the least expensive action to take in exterior restoration. While not as dramatic as replacing inappropriate windows or removing vinyl shingles, it will protect a building against weathering and help preserve the historic structure. Changing paint color to a more appropriate shade has also been shown to inspire neighbors and encourage other historic property owners to properly paint and rehabilitate their own buildings. Believe it or not, returning an historic structure to its original color scheme can actually create a positive chain reaction which may increase pride of ownership, attract visitors, and increase income. Its also important to note that the costs associated with paint analysis and paint restoration may be considered applicable restoration costs, depending upon the town's Main Street program requirements, building location and historic designation. Appropriate local, state and national guidelines should always be consulted when considering paints analysis.

Its time that we embrace the glorious colors that originally adorned the interiors and exteriors of Maryland's historic homes and businesses. Paint analysis can help us do that. And considering its historic and economic value, it should be a part of any restoration project.

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Upcoming Events

Maryland Municipal League Convention to Include a "Municipal Main Street"

This year's Maryland Municipal League Convention, which will be held in Ocean City from June 25-28, will include a new feature - the "Municipal Main Street". This full service "neighborhood" will be located in Exhibit Hall C and will include a park, coffee shop, cyber café and a city jail. Cities and towns from across the state can purchase an 8' x 10' booth - which will have an overhead façade to create the feel of a real streetscape - on Municipal Main Street for \$160.

MML encourages those municipalities that purchase a booth to display photos and information of a recent project or event that the city or town is particularly proud of. If you have questions about the Municipal Main Street, please contact Linda Burrell at 410-268-5514 or visit www.mdmunicipal.org.

Maryland Economic Development Association Spring Conference Focuses on Destination Marketing

Destination Marketing is an important industry for economic development practitioners. In many cases, the tourism office operates within the office of Economic Development. Why is Destination Marketing so important to the efforts of the Economic Developer? Who is planning some of the biggest efforts in Maryland? And what does it take to partner with those who are responsible for the major Destination Marketing efforts?

Join MEDA at Ripken Stadium in Aberdeen on Thursday, April 13 to hear about these topics and more. Former Oriole and Vice President of Ripken Baseball, Bill Ripken, will provide the keynote address. For more information visit www.medamd.com or contact Pam Ruff at 410-575-6027

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Modern zoning regulations typically impose rigid separations of land uses, geographically isolating residential areas from places of work, entertainment venues and shopping establishments. By their very nature however, town centers are compact areas of development containing a mix of residential, retail, and institutional uses within walking distance from one another. To create, revitalize, or maintain sustainable town centers, it is important for land use regulations to allow for a wide range of uses within close proximity to one another.

An Appropriate Density of Land Use is Critical

To achieve the critical mass of people and activities needed to support a vibrant town center, it is important to have a dense mix of land uses. Increasing the density of a town center can be accomplished by encouraging infill development on empty or underutilized lots, and by increasing the allowable height and density of buildings in a manner consistent with the town's character.

Town Centers Should Provide Pedestrian Friendly Environments

One good measure of a town center's vitality is the amount of pedestrians on the sidewalks. To enhance the character and sustainability of town centers, it is critical to create environments that encourage people to walk. Land use regulations should strive to accomplish this goal by fostering dense, mixed use development, as well as mandating design standards that improve pedestrian access to homes and businesses and slow down automobile traffic.

You can download sections from the guidebook for free at <http://www.vtsprawl.org/Resources/publications/communityrulesmain.htm>

Website of the Month

www.downtowndevelopment.com

For more than 50 years, the New York based Downtown Research & Development Center has provided a forum for exchanging news, information and ideas on how to rebuild the hearts of America's cities. The organization's website, www.downtowndevelopment.com, has a wealth of free information of use to downtown development professionals, planners, and business people.

For example, a section of the site entitled "Downtown Idea Exchange" Provides detailed case studies, practical news reports, how-to information and hundreds of real-world examples of how traditional downtowns, business improvement districts, main street communities and others are growing and prospering. Another section entitled the "Downtown Promotion Reporter" provides practical tools on how to bring people back downtown. There is also a free e-newsletter called the "Downtown Digest" that contains further articles, tips, and national news related to downtown development.



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Save The Date!

The next MDDA Free Friday Workshop will be held at Bowie City Hall at 2614 Kenhill Drive in Bowie on March 31st at 10AM. Our speaker will be Peirce MacGill, Revitalization Specialist for the Baltimore County Department of Economic Development. He will discuss Baltimore County's innovative façade restoration program and will bring us up to date on all the good things happening in the County's many neighborhood commercial districts. For more information call 410-889-6241 or e-mail at marylanddowntown@earthlink.net