

In an effort to attract more businesses and people to the city's downtown district, the Laurel City Council is fielding applications for \$30,000 in grant funding.

Through the Main Street Business Relocation Grant Program, the City Council will award six businesses up to \$5,000 grants to move to Main Street starting January. The program is designed to help qualifying businesses pay for costs including interior remodeling, on-site signage and moving incidentals.

"We could take that \$5,000 and turn it into jobs," Councilman Michael Leszcz (At-large) said.

Funding for the program is included in the city's fiscal 2011 budget, but will be continued as funding permits, Leszcz said.

U.S. Rep. Steny H. Hoyer (D-Dist. 5) of Mechanicsville praised the program during his Oct. 28 visit to Main Street. Mayor Craig Moe said he hopes Hoyer can use the visit to do more for them in Congress.

Debbie Zook, the owner of Rainbow Florist & Delectables Inc., said foot traffic is needed the most downtown.

"I can barely make payroll every week," Zook said. "They say the strong will survive, but it's hard."

Hoyer said aiding and building up the small business community will help boost the economy by creating jobs, and largely put the country on a path toward relying less on foreign resources.

"We have to keep creating things," Hoyer said. "If we stop creating things then creators are going to go overseas."

Nancy Graham, the executive director of Laurel Advocacy and Referral Services Inc., a company that offers services to needy families and individuals, agreed with Hoyer.

"I'm glad that they included us," Graham said. "For the economy to do well all the people in it have to be doing well. It starts with small businesses and helping people who need jobs."

The application for the grant program is available on the city's website, [www.laurel.md.us](http://www.laurel.md.us) .

Eligible businesses must provide products or services not already provided on Main Street. The first recipients are to be announced upon approval of Laurel's mayor and City Council. Available areas include Main Street from First to Seventh Street, and side streets from U.S. Route 1 to Fourth Street and streets on Route 1 from Montgomery Street to the Patuxent River.

There are several vacancies in the downtown district, according to Laurel Board of Trade member Bob Mignon. Although he could not confirm how many, but said that there are "more than we'd like to see."

"Hopefully the grant will allow for more businesses to come to Main Street," Mignon said. "It's not a lot of grant money, but every little bit helps."

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