

NEW DIRECTION FOR DOVER?

City leaders to start master plan for downtown area



Delaware State News/Marc Clery

Traffic heads west on Lookerman Street in downtown Dover last week. Downtown Dover Partnership recently announced that it has hired Mosaic Development Partners to create a master plan for the capital city's downtown area.

By Logan B. Anderson

Delaware State News

DOVER — Downtown Dover has started down a path of rebirth.

The area's economic development engine, the Downtown Dover Partnership, recently announced that it has hired Mosaic Development Partners to create a master plan for the capital city's downtown area. The plan will guide city leaders and stakeholders to redevelop and recruit new businesses and residents to the area.

Now that the contracts have been signed, the work to engage the community will begin. Using public input, the Mosaic team will look for residential, business and workforce opportunities; study

trends in the economy and how people are living and working; then guide investment and redevelopment strategies to transform the city over the next eight years.

Target date for completion of the plan is September.

"(When the redevelopment is done) I see a transformed Dover. I see additional mixed-use development to encourage a significant number of residents. They might be millennials, they might be retirees, they might be single ... so that there's an after 5 p.m. population here," said DDP Executive Director Diane Laird.

Mosaic Development Partners co-founders and principals, Leslie Smallwood and Greg Reaves, said

they are excited to get started on the plan.

"The DDP will be included in all phases of the development of the master plan," Mr. Reaves said. "Mosaic will lead and coordinate the first-class team we've put together to bring all key stakeholders through the phases we've outlined ... This work includes stakeholder and community outreach, evaluation of the existing infrastructure, zoning, market and financial analysis, transportation, development of the strategy and documentation of the plan."

Dover City Councilman Fred Neil was one of 11 panelists se-

See **Dover** — Page 7

Dover

Continued From Page 1

lected by Mosaic to guide the city through the process.

“As part of the review panel of the seven organizations that were considered, Mosaic was by far the best equipped to mesh the history of Dover with our immediate need and the evolving world of the future. Their experience with diverse communities and their impressive ability with existing projects, which includes pulling together a broad variety of funding sources, are a few of the examples that indicate they will be a perfect fit,” Councilman Neil said.

Mosaic’s team includes architectural firms, economic impact consultants and community engagement experts.

“The team will work closely with the DDP to conduct a deep analysis of Dover’s existing infrastructure and will hold community engagement sessions and charrettes to discover together the best projects and locations for optimal impact going forward,” Ms. Laird said.

The Philadelphia-based community engagement firm Connect the Dots will lead the next phase of the plan.

“We will work to develop creative online and offline strategies to meet people where they are,” said Connect the Dots Director Marisa Denker.

How it got started

The DDP owns the property at 120 S. Governors Ave. — the site of the former Acme store and current auto parts and daycare business.

Seeing a need for change in the area and recognizing that the property had a lot more potential, the group sat down and started to brainstorm what to do with the spot. DDP officials met with the Mosaic team and discussed knocking down the current structure and building a larger mixed-use building complete with retail, dining and residential space.

DDP’s concept would not only provide new commercial space but would also bring more downtown residents to support businesses.



The target area for the plan includes Lookerman Street and adjacent neighborhoods in Dover. The city’s downtown area comprises 250 square acres.

This similar model could apply to several vacant or underutilized sites downtown.

According to Ms. Laird, talks about the Governors Avenue property grew to include discussions about the surrounding area and then the whole of downtown. It was that discussion that led DDP and city officials to decide that they needed to create a comprehensive redevelopment plan for the whole area. Dover’s downtown area comprises 250 square acres.

Change isn’t easy

The strategic redevelopment of key parcels will be critical for the success of the downtown area, Ms. Laird said.

“We need live-in residents to really capture an after 5 p.m. and a weekend population on a regular basis. That’s one thing I’d like to see. I believe it has to happen to really transform downtown,” Ms. Laird said.

The DDP director also said downtown needs more restaurants,

but restaurants need infrastructure that may not be available in downtown.

Dover City Manager Dave Hugg recognizes that upgrading some of the city’s older buildings may be daunting to some.

“New construction can be compelling for potential tenants because the spaces are already wheelchair accessible, and they’re clean vanilla shells that will require only minor fit-out to be ready for a business to move in. Many of Dover’s older historic buildings are beautiful, but they often need to be retrofitted and brought up to code when changing hands. This can be time-consuming, and sometimes costly. The process can also be intimidating to a business owner,” he said.

The target area for the plan includes Lookerman Street and adjacent neighborhoods in Dover.

This area is also designated as a Qualified Opportunity Zone, indicating that it is a high priority area for redevelopment and rein-

vestment. Delaware State University and DDP representatives have begun meeting regularly to ensure coordination of planning efforts, considering the recent acquisition of the Wesley College campus by DSU and opportunities for a stronger college presence downtown.

Ms. Laird said she is excited to get to work. Once the plan is complete, residents and business owners should see some projects get underway immediately.

“Our hope is to have the plan in one hand, and either a shovel or a bulldozer in the other. We got the plan, start digging. I don’t like talking about things for too long,” Ms. Laird said.

The planning project should cost the DDP about \$200,000. The funds to assist for the projects will be identified during the planning phase.

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