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## **Downtown Dover Property Improvements Sought**

(Dover, DE) The Downtown Dover Partnership (DDP) announced that a second round of funding will be allocated for improvements to downtown business district properties in need of critical repairs and upgrades. Property owners must complete a pre-application to be considered for funding.

Allocations for these kinds of improvements began while the *Capital City 2030: Transforming Downtown Dover* master plan was being developed and in anticipation of new construction that will soon be a reality. It positions older buildings to be leased more competitively alongside projected new development.

“Vacancy in the Dover central business district is exacerbated by the fact that many buildings are in extremely poor condition,” according to DDP Executive Director Diane Laird. “The gap in financing to bring these properties up to current use versus the actual property value once the buildings are improved is simply too wide for property owners to make the needed improvements. But doing so will make them more leasable, and that will spur economic growth in the downtown commercial core.”

Last year, the DDP allocated nearly \$1.2 million dollars toward ten projects that, once completed, will result in as many as eight ADA restrooms, fire suppression systems, and several residential apartments above ground floor retail spaces, as well as several new commercial kitchens to bring restaurants and eateries so needed to support a thriving business district.

When funding from the DDP’s Critical Improvements Program (CIP) is coupled with other state and local incentives, property owners’ personal outlay becomes proportionately less. Donny Legans, owner of the new Rail Haus beer garden layered many sources of funding to enable him to bring the project over the finish line. “In a project like this, costs add up quickly! The CIP funding came in at just the right time to cover a sprinkler system, as well as the new commercial kitchen and ADA compliant restrooms,” Legans said. “I can sense Dover on the cusp of a truly great and impactful development boom and CIP is the partner program helping lead the way.” Rail Haus is located at 92 N. West Street in Dover and is Delaware’s first beer garden to be open year ‘round.

Each dollar of funding in the first round is expected to leverage approximately five dollars from the private sector, resulting in nearly a \$6 million reinvestment in downtown. This second round

is anticipated to add another \$675,000 CIP funds toward eligible projects which, once completed, will total over \$3M investment in additional building improvements. These investments will be taking place while action begins on the DDP's priority redevelopment project at 120 S. Governor's Ave.

"The Downtown Dover Partnership, along with developer Mosaic Development Partners and project partner Colonial Parking Inc., are now finalizing a joint redevelopment agreement for construction of a new mixed-use property," commented DDP Project Development Director Ken Anderson. "An 'almost adjacent' 300 space multi-modal parking facility will be part of that project and is targeted for completion by the end of 2026."

A DDP Critical Improvements Review Panel will review pre-applications in mid-February, after which those whose projects most align with program criteria will be invited to make a formal application. "We coordinate very closely with the Dover City Planning office. As part of the process to formally apply for Critical Improvements funding, property owners will need to meet with planning staff to determine if projects are feasible, and if so, projects will be considered for an allocation of funds," explained DDP Director of Operations Tina Bradbury, who also works with property owners to help determine the various incentives for which their projects may be eligible.

"The panel members will then look at each final application with the priorities of the grant program and anticipated completion timeframes in mind, as well as occupancy status of the properties," Laird said. Funds will not be dispersed to the property owners until work is completed according to the approved applications, a certificate of occupancy is obtained, and properties are leased and occupied for thirty days. Projects with a targeted completion within one year are a high priority.

Pre-applications are due by Thursday, February 8 and the pre-application may be accessed at <https://tinyurl.com/CriticalImprovements>. Final applications will be taken in March. For information on the grant program and the master plan, visit: [www.DowntownDover.com](http://www.DowntownDover.com).

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The Downtown Dover Partnership is committed to driving an improved quality of life for the residents and visitors of Dover, Delaware, through collective collaboration, economic development and promotion of downtown Dover's unique historic properties. Call 302-678-2940 or visit: [www.DowntownDover.com](http://www.DowntownDover.com)

***Four images follow...***



Project partners celebrate Rail Haus owners' receipt of Critical Improvements funding. Owners Kim and Donny Legans are behind/to right of the sign.



Commercial kitchens are considered a critical improvement as the Dover central business district needs additional food options. (Chefs, Right to Left) Head Chef Steve Walls, Sous Chef James Blackwell, Line Cooks Rich Evans, Vernell Scott and Joshua Holmes





Rail Haus' ADA rest rooms include sinks that allow clear floor space and grab bars surrounding toilets.

