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VIEWPOINT: Transforming Downtown Dover through planning, action

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Downtown Dover Partnership Executive Director Diane Laird

More than 700 community members have been engaged in a master planning process to proactively guide the future of Dover's business district. Led by [Mosaic Development Partners](#), "Capital City 2030: Transforming Downtown Dover" is an eight-month long process that includes a full cadre of downtown partners, and is more than halfway complete.

Mosaic Cofounders and Principals Leslie Smallwood and Greg Reaves have carefully assembled a highly capable team of professional firms to provide this comprehensive plan for Dover, including Bernardon, Econsult Solutions, and Kimley-Horn. Sponsors of the plan include State of Delaware, Kent County, the City of Dover, and the Downtown Dover Partnership.

Collective input revealed that people would like to see a vibrant and activated downtown, preservation of the historic character, more entertainment options for families and young people, improved public safety, and more opportunities for job growth and small businesses.

Survey respondents indicated that the highest key assets of Downtown Dover are the historic character, small businesses, and arts and culture. For areas of improvement, the top results are restaurants and nightlife, more locally owned businesses, and family friendly activities. Participants said they would come downtown for grocery stores, department stores, and restaurants and nightlife.

Hearing from area leaders and inviting the community to be part of this process is vital for a successful outcome, not only to identify a collective vision for planning, but to weigh that vision against the realities of the market, and alongside the infrastructure and assets that are now within, or will be needed, to broadly transform the heart of the Capital City.

While the vision and desires expressed through the community's participation were not surprising, it was important to confirm them. Engagement at the earliest stages of the process is also critical to gain the momentum necessary to move the final plan from concept to reality.

In addition to the survey, local subject matter experts and thought leaders will have participated in five charrettes by the end of August, after which the public will be invited to see and provide feedback on concepts, ideas, solutions, and designs that have been fleshed out over the planning process.

In October, the Mosaic team will present final conceptual solutions and strategic recommendations in a wide array of topic areas including infrastructure, zoning, financing, workforce development and more.

It's anticipated that a significant increase of residential opportunities will be recommended, as local anchors like Delaware State University, Bayhealth and the Dover Air Force Base have indicated increasing housing needs.

Strategic redevelopment of key downtown parcels is critical for the success of the downtown. Updating and expanding infrastructure will be necessary to prepare for the growth.

In anticipation of redevelopment to occur as a result of the plan, the Downtown Dover Partnership was just awarded over \$1 million for critical enhancements to existing commercial buildings on or near Loockerman Street to bring them into ADA compliance, to address life safety issues and to add commercial kitchens to bring in more restaurants.

The goal of this funding is to bridge gaps in financing to fix these older properties, to make them more competitive for leasing against new construction, and to reduce vacancy.

For more information about the Downtown Dover Strategic Master Plan RFP, visit www.DowntownDover.com

Diane Laird is the executive director of the Downtown Dover Partnership, a not-for-profit organization focused on developing and sustaining economic and cultural resources of Dover.