

Downtown Dover parking may be key to growth



Katie Tabeling April 20, 2022

DOVER — In the next decade, Downtown Dover officials hope to see mixed-use and residential buildings rise over the streets, with apartments filled with people eager to shop and dine in the city's commercial district.

And when that happens, Downtown Dover Partnership Executive Director Diane Laird argues the need for turnover at the 658 lots will be bigger than ever.

“Dover may not be as urban as Wilmington, but it is a commercial district. The busier we get, there will be businesses on State Street down to Forest Avenue — and it will happen, it will just take time,” Laird said. “The intent is to draw attention to the opportunities in Downtown Dover, and bring investment. When that ball starts rolling, we absolutely need to have a parking system ready.”

The DDP and Colonial Parking finished a parking management plan that outlines a need for meters and permits at some parking spaces, to keep foot traffic moving on weekdays. But since the DDP has contracted with Mosaic Development Partners to master plan the area, parking meters are on hold until further notice.

For years, the Dover Parking Authority and the DDP have been wrestling with parking. Many visitors have issues with finding street parking and understanding how long they can park without getting ticketed. In the past, business owners have taken the premium parking spots on the streets, which exacerbates the issue.

These days, Dover may have enough space for business and foot traffic, especially as many offices remain in a hybrid workflow. But the DDP is forecasting that two key things may change that: Delaware State University is settling into its downtown campus and now weighing its future role in the state's capital, and Mosaic's track-record of investing in diverse neighborhoods to spur growth.

The drafted parking management plan affects 263 on-street parking spaces on Loockerman, Bradford, State and Reed Streets; Governors Avenue and Kings Highway, as well as 395 off-street parking spaces in lots on Bradford, Minor, and Loockerman streets as well as Governors Avenue.

As proposed, the parking meters would be in effect from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., although some off-street parking along Governors Avenue would be made available. Monthly passes would also be issued and could be managed through an online website, much like EZPass's interface.

Free parking would be available on weekends and holidays, under the plan. There would also be electric vehicle charging stations and bicycle stands.

"It's almost like the principle of land development. It's about the waterfront property, versus two streets back from the water, versus five streets back," Laird said. "If you don't want to pay to park in front of the store you want to visit, park a little further down."

In a sense, it may be impossible to determine whether downtown Dover revitalization will draw more demand for parking turnover, or vice versa. But Laird believes it's critical to have a plan —one that views parking as the go-between for a car experience and a pedestrian experience —ready to work when the time comes.

Key components to the Downtown Dover master plan is boosting residential opportunities, be it near Loockerman Way Plaza or renovating the shuttered Acme building.

"The bottom line is that we have a solution today that is able to change as the needs change. Once there's more foot traffic downtown, we need to manage it so people are not taking up spaces longer than needed," she said. "Once you have hundreds and hundreds of residents in downtown, then you'll see the need for the retail to support it."

For more information about the DDP parking management plan,

visit <https://tinyurl.com/DoverParkingSolutions>