

**CITY OF DOVER PLANNING COMMISSION**  
**June 16, 2025**

The Meeting of the City of Dover Planning Commission was held on Monday, June 16, 2025, at 7:00 PM as an In-Person Meeting and also using the phone/videoconferencing system Webex. The Meeting Session was conducted with Chair Mr. Witham presiding. Members present were Mr. Michael Lewis, Mr. Roach (arrived virtual at 7:08PM), Mrs. Denney, Mrs. Maucher, Mr. Baldwin, Dr. Jones, Mr. Reaves (virtual), Mrs. Welsh, and Mr. Witham.

Staff members present were Mrs. Dawn Melson-Williams, Mr. Christopher Salzano, and Mrs. Kristen Mullaney.

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

*Mrs. Maucher moved to approve the Agenda as submitted, seconded by Dr. Jones and the motion was carried 8-0 with Mr. Roach absent.*

**APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES OF MAY 19, 2025**

*Mrs. Welsh moved to approve the Planning Commission Meeting Minutes of May 19, 2025, seconded by Mrs. Maucher and the motion was carried 8-0 with Mr. Roach absent.*

*Mr. Roach arrived to meeting virtually at 7:08PM.*

**COMMUNICATIONS & REPORTS**

Mrs. Melson-Williams stated that the next Planning Commission regular meeting is scheduled for Monday, July 21, 2025, at 7 PM. We do have an application that was just filed to be heard that evening.

Mrs. Melson-Williams provided an update on the regular City Council and various Committee meetings held on June 9 & 10, 2025.

Mrs. Melson-Williams stated that as noted, we are processing a number of Event Permits tied to festivals. She believes this coming weekend would be the African American Festival and then we will be into the Fourth of July soon after. There is an update on the Kenton Road project if your travels take you to that part of the City. There was a Public Advisory that was issued today. They are still in Phase 2 where the southbound of Kenton Road between College Road and Route 8 is closed. Hopefully that will be transitioning later this month but for more detailed information about their phasing for this project, it is recommended that you visit the website that they have up which is [www.Kentonroadimprovements.com](http://www.Kentonroadimprovements.com). It lays out all of the phases; it gives aerial shots of current conditions in the corridor. Their phasing plan takes them through June 2026 at this point. It looks like they may have to pause a little bit over the winter depending on what type of activity they are going to be in. That corridor from Route 8 to Maple Dale Road is going to have various versions of closures over the next year.

**OPENING REMARKS CONCERNING DEVELOPMENT APPLICATIONS**

Mrs. Melson-Williams presented the audience information on policies and procedures for the In-Person Meeting and Virtual Meeting using the Webex system.

**OLD BUSINESS**

**Requests for Extensions of Planning Commission Approval:** None

**NEW BUSINESS**

**Presentation on Dover's Downtown Development District (DDD) Program Relaunch**

Visit <https://www.cityofdover.com/departments/Planning/dovers-downtown-development-district-210248>

**Representative:** Mrs. Ann Marie Townshend, Rossi Group

Mrs. Melson-Williams stated that our first presentation this evening is a presentation on Dover's Downtown Development District Program. We call it the DDD. It is a relaunch, and we have Mrs. Ann Marie Townshend from the Rossi Group and also Mr. Chris Salzano from the Planning Office who will be giving this presentation this evening.

Mrs. Townshend stated that for those of you who may not be as familiar with the history of the Downtown Development District Program, in 2014 the General Assembly passed the Downtown Development District Act. The purpose of the Act was to spur capital investments, stimulate job growth, help build a stable community of long-term residents by improving housing opportunities, and assist municipalities basically in strengthening the Downtowns. There was an application period. The City of Dover submitted an application along with a District Plan and we were one of the first three designated in that first round. There was one from each County. It was Wilmington, Dover and Seaford. The way that the program works is that the designation is good for ten years and then after the 10 years, the designated municipalities are eligible for up to two, five-year extensions. As of today, there are twelve designated Downtown Development Districts and three came up on the first window of renewal; again, Wilmington, Seaford and Dover. We submitted last year; Rossi Group worked with the City to develop the District Plan, do the program assessment, and complete the application. That was done and it went to the Cabinet Committee on State Planning Issues and then last summer, the City got a letter from the Governor letting us know that we were extended for an additional five years. So, that extension began on February 1, 2025, and will go through January 30, 2030. The bulk of the program success in Dover really has been the housing. There has been really some transformational change in neighborhoods. When we did the application in 2014, we used two different planning documents as kind of the direction for the plan. They were kind of the heart of the plan. One of those was "Restoring Central Dover" which NCALL, now NeighborGood Partners, was the lead. There still is a lot of collaboration through "Restoring Central Dover" on improving the housing stock, providing homeownership opportunities really for people who are low to moderate income. One of the big fears when you get into revitalization is, are you going to displace the people who live there to bring in new people with more money and then you end up with gentrification. Through Restoring Central Dover, there has really been an effort to balance everything. More than 65 homes have been built between Habitat for Humanity, NeighborGood Partners, Milford Housing Development Corporation, and then a few built by private for-profit builders. That was really transformational. You can see North Kirkwood Street just entirely

transformed and if you drive around Downtown, you can really see the difference. There have been some very successful commercial investments as well. Janaid's on Loockerman Street was one of the first two or three projects in Dover to actually get through the program and get the rebate. He is doing very well, and he is now looking at doing residential on the upstairs of his properties, which again, is one of the priorities of all of the Downtown planning. Rail Haus is another example of a large commercial success. Stonerail Market is another example. The commercial success hasn't been as transformational as we were hoping. She thinks COVID didn't help us with that. But certainly, she thinks the winds are shifting and things are getting stronger in that area.

There are a variety of incentives. The big incentive with the State's Downtown Development District Program is a rebate of up to 20% of the capital cost of construction, renovation or whatever of the project. She can't think of one property owner or business owner who has taken advantage of this that we talked to, that didn't say that this was the difference that made it viable. Without this 20% rebate, the numbers just wouldn't work. The other thing is that the State wants to see that the local governments also have some skin in the game. The City has a variety of incentives. There is a waiver of the City's portion of the water and wastewater impact fees, a waiver of the Building Permit fees, and a waiver of the Business License fees for new businesses. You still have to get your license, just for three years it doesn't have a fee. Then, here is a 10-year property tax abatement where basically the taxes come in over time. There is also a transfer tax rebate after a project is complete. The last one is the Historic Tax Credit which the City has had for quite some time but that is one of the tools in the toolbox. The Downtown Dover Partnership also has some incentives. For many years, they have had a very successful Façade Grant Program. When we started the Downtown Development District in 2015, they started offering architectural assistance so that if people were doing renovations, it would help to pay for those architectural costs. When we did this back in 2014/2015, we thought about what the challenges that they were finding. There were a lot of people wanting to do renovations on commercial buildings, but they did not have the funds to pay for an architect; so, that was an incentive that really helped people do it the right way, which is what we want. In more recent years, the Downtown Dover Partnership has funding for what is called a Critical Improvement Program. Under that program, they help with the cost of life safety, ADA accessibility, commercial kitchens, and upstairs residential. One of the things that people don't like to do, and she certainly understands, is when you get to a certain level of renovation and your space is a certain size, it has to be sprinklered. It's expensive; this helps to make that cost bearable because the Downtown Dover Partnership, in some cases has provided up to \$300,000 in support to make some of these things happen. For the first ten years or so of the program, Kent County also had a rebate that they would do up to \$10,000 and that is unfortunately, no longer part of the puzzle. As part of the Renewal Application, we did an evaluation and we did focus groups. We really talked to the people who did the projects, found out what worked and what didn't. The numbers are between 2015 and 2023 as that was the data that they had when we did this. The State Rebates totaled \$1.6 million. The value of the City's Incentives was \$73,000 and the private investment leverage of \$13.2 million. That's the goal of the program; it's to replicate that type of success.

The application to update the District Plan was done last spring. City Council approved it in May 2024. The letter from the Governor came in August 2024 and then in February 2025, City

Council approved an Ordinance that amended the boundary. With the initial program, we were more confined in how much land we could have. She thinks it was 225 acres to start and now its 275 acres. We really worked to figure out where was the need. Where are the places that if you expand that boundary, it could really make a difference? Most of that was on the west side. Also in a prior expansion, the boundary on the east side on Loockerman Street was taken to Mirror Lake because you have the old Post Office and you have Treadway Towers; there is opportunity there. That Ordinance was adopted in February and now we get into the relaunch. They have been working on the materials associated with the program and this is where she is going to turn it over to Mr. Salzano to explain.

Mr. Salzano stated that as part of the Downtown Development District Relaunch, we developed a variety of different forms as well as a new website with our consultants at Rossi Group. The first thing (shown on the screen) is our updated website. It is simpler, sleeker and easier for the general public to navigate to get any information they need. Through some talks with our partners at the State, we learned that Dover is one of three Downtown Development Districts that the State still hosts a website for. Since we are now able to maintain our web presence, it would be beneficial for us to really fully take over for our DDD website to be the premier location to find all of that information on Dover's District. Part of this Relaunch and in the next couple of months, we will be updating and integrating the information from the State's page as well as tweaking some things from their page that they liked and we think could benefit people who are looking to take advantage of Dover's Downtown Development District. It's to just help guide people to easy information, the people to contact, and help find any information that they may need or helpful links. Mrs. Townshend mentioned the updated boundary and this is one of the various sheets that they worked on developing with Rossi. The sheet on the screen shows the whole of the Downtown Development District and specifically that DDD Area. They have been divided into that DDD and a Target Area; and this is specifically showing people that this is the Downtown Development District proper. This is where you can leverage all of the City's incentives, the State's incentives, and everything that is really at your disposal for improvement in Downtown Dover. The next slide shows that expanded Target Area. It shows you that this is still an area that you can leverage some incentives but not necessarily all of those same incentives as you can within the Downtown Development District itself. Both of these forms as well as the next few forms have been simplified and streamlined as well as turned into fillable PDF forms for ease of digital navigation and filling out. As part of the DDD Program and as far as the State Historic Preservation Incentives and the City's Historic Preservation Incentives, we developed a form that is showing the various Historic Districts within Dover itself as well as the Dover Historic District proper. This form shows the incentives that you could leverage if you purchase a historic property as well as where the National Registered Districts are in comparison to where the Dover's Historic District is considered. Dover's is that large orange district labeled as the City of Dover Historic Zone. Within that zone, he is sure that we are all aware that there are some additional regulations on what you can and cannot do, but there is also some great incentives including tax incentives for purchasing and renovating a property within that zone. Finally, this is the Downtown Homeownership Incentives Form. Again, we are showing you the overall DDD Area and this form goes over what the Homeownership Incentives are for the Downtown Area, including those Tax Rebates and the Transfer Rebates. This is simplicity and again, making sure the general public can easily access and go through these forms without having too many questions before they come into the Planning Office and start talking about

moving forward with a project. Finally, talking about having incentives, we have our new Incentive Application Form. This form, also streamlined by our partners at Rossi Group and what they have done here is turned it into a fillable form so that it can be easily transferred to the City via email. You can fill it out, give it to a Planner or to the Front Desk and we can evaluate it before you even have to come into City Hall which will definitely help save some people some time if they have any questions. It's just generally make getting DDD applications in and processed easier for everyone involved.

Mrs. Townshend stated that with the boundary change, one of the things that we did was worked with Public Works to put signage at the new locations where you enter the District. It was brought up at the meeting when we were with the Council Committee of the Whole last week about doing something with the Kent Economic Partnership, then Central Delaware Chamber, and the Downtown Dover Partnership to really work together to promote that. That was something that we discussed in the Plan and in the program evaluation. We actually have a meeting next week with them to talk about how we can really work together to really promote the program and promote the incentives. With that, once that meeting is done they will have a press release that will kind of give that public push to hopefully get some more traction on it and get it in people's news feeds.

Mr. Lewis asked if they had any data or knowledge of how Dover's progress compares to the other communities that are involved. Responding to Mr. Lewis, Mrs. Townshend stated that she is going to ask Mr. David Edgehill to answer but every town seems to have a different type of success. Milford has had a lot of business success and they have also had housing. Seaford had that huge large project. Our real success was that transformational change in the neighborhoods. The non-profits that were part of that leveraged other State funds through Strong Neighborhoods. She is not sure that it is easier to say that Dover is more successful or less successful because the way that the program has played out has just been very different.

Mr. Edgehill stated that one of the things that they do in their office is administer the Downtown Development District Program. He was on the team 11-12 years ago that came up with the Downtown Development District Program with Governor Markell and his team. So, your question is how does Dover compare to the other districts and he thinks Mrs. Townshend answered it quite well. Every district has got their own sort of trajectory and their own type of success. He would say that you can't compare any of the districts to Wilmington because Wilmington has a larger type of development. If you look at the metrics, they have really absorbed a majority of the funding. If we look at apples to apples, but it's really not the same thing, because Dover has been extremely successful with the neighborhoods and with the housing. Whereas, he thinks one of the things that they learned through the renewal process and the application that Dover put together with Rossi's help was really the desire to sort of shift that momentum to more mixed use and larger projects. There are two types of projects in the program. There are Small Projects under \$250,000. They are small businesses and homeowners. Large Projects are anything over that and that requires a reservation. But typically, they are larger projects and Dover has had probably not as many of those as we had probably hoped, but as you know, they are poised to see more of those in the coming years which is why the Renewal was very important to Dover and to us. Again, for the other Districts, we have some that are on the lower tier of not having as many projects as we had hoped but most of them are doing quite

well. The three Renewal Districts that had the full ten years to operate the program, all saw transformational change in their Downtowns and were poised. Part of it is having to make the pitch, “well, we aren’t done yet; we have more to do.” In Dover’s case, it was the commercial mixed-use side of things. In Seaford’s case, they had a tremendous success with their Downtown called High Street with an almost 0% vacancy rate with large residential projects. They shifted their success to the neighborhood’s gateway into the Downtown that they hadn’t seen as much activity in. Wilmington, believe it or not they have had great success in their Market Street Corridor with multi-story mixed use buildings, condos, apartments, restaurants, so on and so forth. But they really haven’t done as well with housing. They have got a lot of issues in their neighborhoods on either side of their district and they struggle to shift the focus there. That is just a quick overview but he thinks Dover is doing great. He is really happy that you got the program and that you got the five year renewal now to make some more progress.

Dr. Jones stated that following up on the previous question, is there concerted efforts or stepped up efforts to try to increase the business side of that? Responding to Dr. Jones, Mrs. Townshend stated yes, this is her speaking as someone who has just been around for a long time; we are finally in a position that we are getting significant funds from the State. She knows when she was with the City, she used to say “all the money goes to Wilmington. We need Wilmington money to make a huge dent.” And for the first time, we have that. 25 million dollars from the State through ARPA and other sources and that is going to push the Mobility Center and the multi-story Mixed Use Building at the former Acme site to reality. Sometimes it’s just really hard to get the numbers to work even with that 20% and that funding from the State is going to help push it over and then there are people who are kind of poised to kind of follow suit once that momentum gets going.

Dr. Jones asked if there is a residency requirement for the housing. Responding to Dr. Jones, Mrs. Townshend stated that there isn’t. For the Homeownership Incentives, yes it has to be a primary residence. If for instance you are getting Dover First Start money, one it has to be income qualified. She thinks it has to be under a certain percentage of Area Median Income. You have to qualify per HUD. For the Tax Abatement for owner occupied residential, it has to be your primary residence so it can’t be an investment property. But the 20% rebate, it doesn’t matter.

Dr. Jones asked if the applicant has to be a resident of the State of Delaware. Responding to Dr. Jones, Mrs. Townshend stated that she didn’t believe so.

Dr. Jones asked if there was a requirement for the new homeowner to remain in that home for any period of time. Responding to Dr. Jones, Mrs. Townshend stated that there is not with the DDD Program itself. But the other funding that was leveraged to build all of these new homes, again it was primarily led by NeighborGood Partners and Habitat, and Habitat holds the mortgage. So, they have that mechanism. Typically, the other subsidy that goes into the house, what happens is, it gets placed as a lien like a forgivable loan; and it gets forgivable incrementally over time. Depending on the funding sources, that horizon service is usually five or ten years. If you do sell before that, you have to pay back.

Mr. Witham stated that he noticed that they issued press releases and his question is that there is

a lot going on Downtown with the Downtown Development projects but he doesn't see high visibility on what has happened and what it's doing. Are you trying to count your successes with these projects on other advertising platforms to really get the word out, not just to the Dover community, but to the outside world? Like using YouTube or going to get something on WDOV on television. It's advertising all of this activity to get the word out, not just issuing a press release. The only people who read a press release are the press. Responding to Mr. Witham, Mrs. Townshend stated that's the plan for the meeting that we are having next week; to really among those non-governmental entities that are promoting Dover to really start to develop that method and that strategy. That is the goal for next week for the meeting that they are having with the Chamber, the Kent Economic Partnership, and the Downtown Dover Partnership.

Mr. Witham stated that one thing that he has noticed over the years is that improvements are slowly and incrementally coming to Dover but the fact is that we have a lack of really nice Downtown restaurants. People have tried very hard to build those nice restaurants, though some have failed and some have done better than others. There was a time in which Downtown Dover had a plethora of restaurants and that seemed to attract a lot of people coming Downtown. He knows that we have a situation where did the chicken come first or did the egg come first in attracting people and businesses Downtown, but we still have a high degree of vacancy of buildings Downtown which is problem. Responding to Mr. Witham, Mrs. Townshend stated that is where the Downtown Dover Partnership with their Critical Improvement Program has identified priorities being restaurants and residential above business. That is where they have said these are the things that we are going to find. It is very costly to install a commercial kitchen so that is where they are trying to get the money into people's hands that way to help them pay for those improvements. Part of the challenge with a restaurant is once you pay for the commercial kitchen and everything, you are so leveraged before you even open the door that it's really hard, which is why you see a high failure rate. The idea is that if the Partnership can help get some of the commercial kitchens underway, that will take the burden off of business owners.

Mrs. Denney stated that for many years she managed medical practices and also did some things for the hospital and one of our major issues was recruiting physicians. Obviously Bayhealth has grown; it was a very small rural hospital. She could follow the doctors through the residencies and their fellowships and bring them down and entertain them. Everything was great, but the wife did not spend her life driving around in her little Volkswagen Bug trying to get her husband through med school and residency and fellowship. So first, the doctors come, and everything is great and then they come back with the wife. The hospital meets with the doctor again and she takes the wife on tours of schools, churches, and housing. It was very difficult to get them to want to live in Dover. Boscov's was not their idea of shopping. They hadn't waited all of these years to shop there; they wanted to be in Nordstroms. It was very difficult, and it was interesting because she would take them out to dinner and she would tell them about when she lived in Camden. Getting up on Saturday morning for a cup of coffee and she would say lets go to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, or the beach or lets go to the Smithsonian because it totally surrounds you if you think about it; it's just not right here. Which is how she ended up getting on the board that was trying to develop the Schwartz Center because she felt like that was at least something. It did help and they did have a lot of things going on there that seemed to have faded away, but she honestly thinks we are headed in the right direction, but we need fine dining. It's not just doctors that you have to recruit; it's doctors' wives, it's accountants, lawyers, etc.

Responding to Mrs. Denney, Mrs. Townshend stated that when they were working on the plan update and we were talking to Delaware State University who had just acquired the Wesley Campus, one of the things that they said is that students who are at the Downtown Campus, when families come to visit they go to the highway. We need to get to where they go somewhere nice Downtown; that it's not just the highway. She thinks that we are really on the cusp of that happening. She is going to be honest, and again, she feels like she uses this as a reason for so many things that haven't gone according to plan and personally, she thinks COVID really hurt us. We had 33 West that was packed all of the time and closed. She really feels like we had momentum going into that.

Mrs. Denney stated that Mrs. Townshend is right on target. We have to remember that we had that hiccup of COVID that set everybody behind. All of the prices got higher, and the economy was shrinking, and it was very difficult. The other thing is that many years ago when she managed the Town of Camden, she wrote an article for Delaware Today Magazine. It was about the castles, the palaces, and the playground. She described Kent County as being the mote in between and she felt that. Anything that was happening, if it was in the Delaware Today Magazine or the papers or anything, we were always on the last page of the book. She wrote a letter to the editor about that, and they printed it on the inside back cover of the book. She thinks that it's interesting because she is finally feeling like some of that is slowly changing; especially post COVID. We have a lot of things going on such as the Amish Bike Tour. We always have great Dover Days. Responding to Mrs. Denney, Mrs. Townshend stated that Dover Con has become a huge thing.

Mrs. Denney stated that it is huge and people travel. Back then, we had the races and things were really beginning, and she feels like we got pushed back. She feels like things are hopeful again and she tends to refer to Dover as the Capital City of the State that started this Nation. We should be using that to attract people who want to understand history. It's right here. Her hope is that things are beginning to turn.

Mr. Lewis stated that just for the record, the races are still here on July 18-20, 2025. [Dovermotorspeedway.com](http://Dovermotorspeedway.com) for ticket information.

Dr. Jones stated that we have had such an influx of people coming to Delaware, coming to Kent County for reasons that we all know and many of them come with financial resources from pensions and homes. You hear them say "I have to go here to do this and that." She won't repeat anything that has been said but that is something to think about. Her question is, in the planning and the brainstorming, how has transportation or lack of come into play or been discussed or has it? Responding to Dr. Jones, Mrs. Townshend stated that it has. In the *Capital City 2030 Plan* which is the heart of the Downtown Development District Plan for the next five years, we wrote the plan around that. They identified activity centers. You have the State Complex, Delaware State University, Bayhealth, and the Air Base. They identified these different activity centers and a lot of the plan was how do you tie together those activity centers and transportation is part of that. They didn't get great detail on transportation in the *Capital City 2030 Plan* but coming out that, the Downtown Dover Partnership and the Dover/Kent MPO put together a consultant and put together the "Pathways Plan" that really looked at how when you look at these activity centers and these activity nodes, how do you connect them through multi-modal whether it's



transit, scooters, micro-mobility, bikes, or improving sidewalks. That plan was finalized at the end of last year. The other component of that is that they added on a streetscape for Loockerman Street because she thinks everybody knows that sometime next year, everything is going to be dug up to improve the water/sewer, stormwater, and everything underground. Then, when they build back what they want, they took that opportunity and developed a streetscape that would activate the sidewalks to make wider sidewalks in some areas. Yes, it's definitely part of the equation and it has gotten some definite planning around it. She thinks that our transit system here is more of a regional transit, not a local transit and that is a challenge. But if we can continue to improve the opportunity for people to get around on bike or on foot, she thinks that will definitely help some. One of her colleague's, his son just moved to Philly and he gets around by electric scooter. It takes less time than driving and it's easier than walking because it's also less time. So, places are doing it. Obviously, we are not Philly but right now she doesn't think that you could really take a scooter on a lot of our sidewalks.

Dr. Jones stated that not only that, but we would have to take a look at our demographics. Those people moving in are not riding bikes. Responding to Dr. Jones, Mrs. Townshend stated that what is interesting is that you talk about bikes, when she was in Lewes, one of their residents who was a very involved Dover resident and now is a very involved Lewes resident who is in his 80's. She would see him out on his e-bike. E-bikes have made cycling more accessible regardless of age. So, it's changing but we still need to be careful.

**Presentation by Delaware Office of State Planning Coordination (OSPC)**

Visit <https://stateplanning.delaware.gov/>

**Representatives:** Mr. David Edgehill, Delaware Office of State Planning Coordination; Mr. Josh Thomas, Delaware Office of State Planning Coordination

Mrs. Melson-Williams stated that this presentation is by the Delaware Office of State Planning Coordination. We have Mr. David Edgehill and Mr. Josh Thomas who have a variety of things to share with us tonight.

Mr. Edgehill stated that he is the Director of the Delaware Office of State Planning Coordination and he is also a Dover resident. He lives right across the street from Mrs. Denney. We have been neighbors since 1997. It is great living in Dover and being here with you tonight. With him tonight is Mr. Josh Thomas. He has a presentation for you tonight. He is going to tell you all about our office and what we do and how we interact with our local governments including City of Dover. You already know about the Downtown Development Districts and he just wanted to follow up with Mr. Lewis. He actually found some information about how Dover is doing compared to the rest. Mr. Thomas is going to tell you a little more about the program, although he thinks we know an awful lot about Downtown Development District now so we can maybe skip through that. He mentioned Wilmington which is kind of a different category. In terms of total updated figures as of the end of 2024, total private investment in Dover is up to \$18.8 million with \$2.1 million of State Rebate associated with that. That puts Dover in terms of total investments, fourth among the twelve (12) districts. The others are Wilmington, Milford, and Seaford but Dover is actually the third highest in the number of the five large projects. Dover is doing great, holding your on and making great prides with that program with much more to go.

Our office has a very small staff, a really dedicated team that does a lot of things together but we do specialize and are organized around three circuit rider planners. We have one Principal Planner assigned to each County. Mr. Thomas is the Principal Planner assigned to Kent County; so, he is the person who works closely with Dover.

Mr. Thomas stated that they really just wanted to give you an overview of our Office and kind of our roles and responsibilities and how we work with the City of Dover Staff and some of the ways we engage with the City currently and some of the things we can do going forward. Also, we'll just touch on a few of the current things that we are working on. As you can see on the screen, our Mission Statement and a lot of times in planning you talk about the three C's. It is right in our name; the biggest thing is coordination for us and they are trying to bring the different levels of government together to make really smart and efficient land use decisions. The first thing that he really wants to touch on is new for 2025; we just launched our email newsletter. We are really excited about this and we have actually only had one. We anticipate our second one going out tomorrow so you have an opportunity to be an earlier subscriber. If you want to be in the know about things we are working on, give us your email address before we leave and we will make sure you hopefully get the email tomorrow morning. The pdf that we provided to Staff does have some links in there. Obviously, if you don't do it immediately, we can still get you connected. That newsletter is going to have helpful information about things that are happening and he is going to touch on some of those a little later in the presentation. Starting at the high level, one of the most common ways that we interact with our local government partners is through the comprehensive planning process. You see a couple examples on the screen. Dover is in the middle. It is hard to believe that we are at the five year mark already; we are at the halfway point. We was actually talking to Staff recently about the fact that we are at the five-year review time. It is very encouraging to see that the next item on the agenda is looking at the *Comprehensive Plan*. We work with Dover and all of the other local governments during the drafting process to provide guidance during that process and then of course to take it through the administrative approval process, ultimately leading to the certification. Really, once we get the *Comprehensive Plan* certified, we really try to provide some technical assistance and work with local governments to implement the plan. One of the ways that we have done that successfully is through master planning efforts throughout the years. We are here to provide technical assistance to local governments in any ways that we need to implement the plan. One of the other ways that we will interface directly with local governments a lot is through the Preliminary Land Use Service (PLUS). Some of you may be familiar with the process, but we are going to go through what PLUS is and what it's not. Applicants who are working on projects come through PLUS but also local governments do come through PLUS as well when there is an amendment to a plan or something like that. That is another way that we work with Dover or other local governments. For what PLUS is and what it's not; it is a review of major projects. It is a State level review of major land use proposals. We are coordinating with State agencies and property owners or developers about important things about the project before the local land use and approval process. We try to use that to look for alignment with the Strategies for State Policies and Spending which is another thing that he is going to talk about. It can provide some high level information about permitting requirements for State agencies that applicants may not have known about. Really, it is trying to provide some early information to hopefully help applicants navigate the process in a smoother fashion. It is important to note that it is not an approval or denial process for project. It does not replace the local land use decision making

process and it is not a permitting application. It is just important to lay that out, especially for members of the public who may be listening as well. Why do applications have to go through PLUS and which ones? Previously, he mentioned that it exists to encourage that alignment between different levels of government and also it is required in *Delaware Code* for certain projects, mainly because of the benefits that it provides in that early coordination across the agencies. There is a base set of criteria in State Code, but a majority of our local governments actually do have separate arrangements with our office that changes the criteria just a little bit. You can see on the screen that Dover does have a Memorandum of Understanding with our office and that provides the criteria in terms of what types of projects have to go through the PLUS process. You are seeing residential projects that have 125 or more dwelling units come through PLUS. The base number in State Code is actually 50 units. You can see that when we have local government partners who are very familiar with the planning process and PLUS and the types of things that might be brought to light in PLUS, we can sometimes raise those thresholds. For non-residential projects, you are looking at 75,000 SF or greater. It is also important to note that one of the other requirements for PLUS is for any type of Rezoning or *Comprehensive Plan* Amendment. There are times when you have to amend your *Comprehensive Plan* and that may require a PLUS review but there also may be times when there is a Rezoning or a change to a property that is inconsistent with the Plan and that will kind of force an amendment to happen. So that is another way that we would have to go through the PLUS process. The next slide shows some real brief stats from PLUS so that you can kind of get a sense of the number of applications and it shows by type. Last fiscal year, they had a total of 97 PLUS applications. This gives you a sense of the number of land use reviews going on around the State. It is not a huge number but those are the larger projects. The graph on the slide gives you a breakdown. You can see that the majority of them were Subdivision Plans or Site Plans. But as he mentioned, there were 13 different *Comprehensive Plan* amendments. Our website has a wealth of information that hopefully you can get in there and navigate around. The PLUS process does have a Dashboard if you ever want to see a map based interface showing current projects or previous projects, check out the Dashboard and explore that. You can link to all the applications, plans, and comment letters. The PLUS stats kind of hinted at this, but every year the Cabinet Committee on State Planning Issues works with our office to prepare an Annual Report on State Planning Issues. That is an advisory document to the Governor's Office and the General Assembly. There is a link in the pdf but also he just wanted to show you some brief screen shots and kind of promote this Report as a resource for you. We do publish that every October so we will be working on the 2025 Report very soon. That Report always starts with development trends. We are very grateful that City of Dover annually provides our office with the Building Permit stats and development application stats that they can then use to compile with all of the other local governments around the State to produce some summary information about how we are growing. This is really kind of a plug for the Report. You can see how we try to break it down by looking at five year timeframes, looking at where the development is happening and at what State strategy levels. The next slide shows a screenshot of our Development Trends Dashboard. This is another resource on our website and this is a way more interactive version of what he just showed you. The Annual Report will give you those high-level stats but then the Dashboard allows you to go in and look at individual applications on a map. You get a sense of the distribution of the development and you can see how we are growing. You can look at Building Permits, Development Applications, and you are also looking at PLUS Applications. This is a really helpful resource that we encourage you to use when you

want to get some of that information about our development trends. We also work with local governments on Municipal Annexations. That is primarily through the Plan of Services Process. When a local government has a proposal for Annexation, the local government works with our office to submit a Plan of Services approval request, potentially documenting that the local government has worked with the property owners and all of the providers of infrastructure and services to document that that property can be served by town resources. Once that Plan of Services Application is approved by our office, then the local government can proceed with Annexation process. The Annual Report just gives you some quick numbers. Last year, they had 29 Plan of Services Applications for roughly 1,000 acres 21 of those actually did get adopted so that meant that 644 acres have been formally annexed. Of course that number does fluctuate. We also try to coordinate a wealth of demographic information. We do have the Census State Data Center responsibilities in our Office; so we do provide coordination with the Delaware Population Consortium and also the Census data and our website has a lot of that information as well. The last presentation by Mrs. Townshend and Mr. Salzano did a great job of talking about DDD's so we don't need to spend a lot of time on it. We practically covered everything but the only thing that he will say is just a reminder that really the Office of State Planning is your partner when it comes to administering the designation process. We were very proud that Dover was the first District to get approved by the State for renewal. Rossi Group and City Staff were fantastic to work with on that process. So, that is our role in the process but then we also have the State Housing Authority who is administering the rebate program and working through those details. One of the other roles that we have is GIS coordination. Essentially, that is our Geographic Information Systems data and our office has a GIS Coordinator named Jason Vogl; and he participates with stakeholders and public throughout the State and a lot of local government Staff members to essentially make sure that all of the data that you need to make decisions on land use and planning and administrative decisions is available. A lot of that comes through the First Map Portal. That is just a fancy name for the platform that kind of serves all of the data.

Last but not least, he wants to spend a little time talking about the Strategies for State Policies and Spending. As he mentioned, he tried to give an overview as a refresher about the roles of our office and what we provide the local governments, but this topic here is a little more timely because we are working on the five-year update of this policy document. So, he just wants to spend a lot time going through State Strategies and he is talking about where we are in the current update process. We started off the presentation talking about how important coordination is and really the purpose of the Strategies for State Policy and Spending; we commonly shorten that to State Strategies. The purpose is to coordinate the land use decisions that happen at the local government level with the provision of infrastructure services at the State level. As you probably know, there are not that many states where the State government provides the bulk of the infrastructure and services. So, we need to coordinate that because if we do not coordinate them, then we have land use policies that could cause wasteful spending on infrastructure, lack of coordination where we are really not developing efficiently and we could be doing better. If we don't have that coordination between infrastructure and local decisions, then programs like the DDD that we just talked about and all of the benefits of those programs will not be as successful. This slide shows the *Delaware Code* requirement. You can see the highlighted portions of text that talk about this as the State's primary policy guide. The point is to support the most efficient use of State resources. We have to update it every five years. On the screen, you

have a snapshot of the current Strategies and then he is going to go through briefly and talk about the different levels before we get into the update. He just wants to remind everyone that even though we are working on the 2025 Strategies, until that is officially adopted and implemented through an executive board by Governor Meyer's Office, the 2020 Strategies are still in effect and that is important to note. The map from 2020 Strategies is shown on the screen but it just provides an overview and a little zoom into Kent County. Take a mental snapshot of the colors and how they interact with the way you know the State looks in terms of its distribution along Route 1 and Route 13. The five different levels are Levels 1-4 and Out of Play and are represented on that map in a series of colors. What we are doing this year is we've produced what they are calling "level profiles" and we are going to have versions of this information in the document like you are seeing on the slide. It tries to break it down as simple as possible of what the land uses look like in the different investment levels. Level 1 that is where we are right now. It's your urban centers, your downtowns, and your municipalities. You have a wide range of uses. As we talked about with DDD, you are trying to encourage a lot of infill and redevelopment and downtown revitalization so that should be very familiar to what Level 1 looks like. Level 2 areas are the areas that are going to surround your downtowns. That is your suburban areas. They are pretty close to your city centers and your urban centers. They are rapidly growing. You are going to have a broader mix of housing and commercial options; but probably something more of the corridor style of development. But it is important to note that you are still going to have access to a lot of the infrastructure and services that you need. The policy focus at this level is where the State and local governments still want to invest in growth and make those infrastructure investments. Level 3 is where you are going to start going out, if you can imagine kind of a concentric ring mindset. This is where you start to get out beyond the growth areas but these growth areas are still part of certified comprehensive plans; they just might be a little out further in the future. You are going to have some environmentally sections of land, you are going to have some agricultural lands and you are going to have more of a leap frog development style where you have some growth happening but you still have a lot of open space. Really the infrastructure investments there might not be the highest priority. They are in the long term growth plans but money could probably be better spent elsewhere. Level 4 is where you are really going to see your primary focus being on natural lands and agricultural lands. This is mostly your unincorporated areas. You are going to have small developments or disconnected homes along rural routes. The policy focus here is on preservation, open space, really limiting development, and keeping that growth for agricultural and environmental uses. Out of Play Lands are a little bit easier to think about because they are legally protected lands for conservation or preservation; so it's just not available for development. That is essentially your parks, your wildlife refuges, any agriculture land or forest land that has been protected. When we do the mapping exercise, those just get subtracted out on the map. They are going to show up in a gray color. By all means, this is all available and is going to be available throughout the State Strategies development process, so he doesn't want you to think that you have to absorb all of that today. This is just an overview, but as we go through this process and you will have opportunities to comment as the City of Dover. We really want to encourage you to go in and read more about how Dover's investments levels interact with the surrounding areas. Just some important considerations is that the maps are not parcel based and that's really important to remember. It is a data driven process and the resulting maps are not confined or clipped into individual plots of land. You might have a large piece of ag land that could have three different levels on it depending on what type of environmental features are there, like streams or wetlands.

It is also important to note that there may be circumstances where the State and local governments sometimes have to make investments in Level 3 and Level 4 areas for health, safety, and welfare reasons. One easy example is that DelDOT may have to make infrastructure improvements if there is a dangerous intersection even though it may not be in the priority area for investments.

He is going to end today with talking about the 2025 Update. As he mentioned, they are required to do it every five years. The reason being is that we talked about *Comprehensive Plans*. For any plans that have been certified since the last five-year cycle, we need to incorporate their Comp Plans, all of their data into the Strategies Update. We also might have changes in State agency data and there may be new data layers that were not available to us last time. We have to kind of work and recompile all of that information to produce new maps every five years. This year, the State had a process known as the Data Analysis Work Group. They did that so hopefully you were able to attend or at least find those resources. But essentially, that was a coordination process they did throughout the State just to provide more insight on the data that goes into these maps. The next screen shows the timeline. Governor Meyer's Cabinet Committee on State Planning Issues approved this update timeline last month and this is essentially going to take us through December which is when we will hopefully have our Executive Order to adopt the Strategies. Where we are now is that this month we are releasing what we call the Data Story Map. That allows anybody who is interested to go in and look at all of the different data layers that comprise the Strategies. You can look at what kind of information feeds into the model and you can see how the data in the Dover area is feeding into the Strategies Maps. We released that story map and he is going to talk more about it on the next slide but you can see here that really the next two months are critical. Next month, we will be working on the draft maps and the actual Strategies document of which the Cabinet Committee would essentially review that before it goes out to the public at their August meeting. The Cabinet meeting is on August 11<sup>th</sup> but the hope there is that the Cabinet Committee would approve the release of the Strategies Maps at that time and then we would open a public comment period. Then we start working towards some public workshops in the early fall. That just gives you an idea of where we are going to be over the next couple of months and how the City of Dover will have an opportunity to participate in the process. There is a public workshop coming up in ten days which will really go through some of that story map that he just mentioned; so if any of that seems a little murky, we encourage you to tune in. We are going to have it at DelDOT in their big conference room but there is going to be a hybrid style so you can attend virtually. That will allow our audience to see the different layers that he described that make up the story map and give a tutorial of how to use it. Then you can provide us any comments after you have a chance to go interact with the website. He definitely encourages everyone to attend that and hopefully they can get these slides to you. This should also be going out in the newsletter tomorrow; so, hopefully we can get everyone signed up for that as well. We are anticipating that the survey on the website would close on July 10, 2025.

Mr. Roach thanked them for the information. You have given us a lot but it is definitely informative and he appreciates all of your hard work and diligence. Responding to Mr. Roach, Mr. Thomas stated that means that they did their job right. They wanted to give you an overview and remind you of the things that we offer. Reach out to us with any questions at all and as Mr. Edgehill mentioned, he is the Kent County representative so we can help you work

through anything that we need to work through.

Mrs. Maucher asked who was on the Cabinet Committee. Is it other State agencies that are on it? Responding to Mrs. Maucher, Mr. Thomas stated that it is DelDOT, DNREC, Housing, Division of Small Business, Secretary of State, Department of Agriculture, and it is chaired by the Governor's Office. The membership is actually in the State Code and it spells out the offices that participate. It's not all State agencies but any of the agencies that have some type of role in the way the built environment is developed and land use. Cabinet Committee meetings are open to the public. So, if you ever want to find out what is talked about, you can certainly tune in. We usually try to keep them to an hour or hour and a half.

Mr. Reaves stated it was a great presentation and thank you for the information. He would like to be added to the newsletter.

Mr. Witham stated that when he graduated from high school and went to the University of Delaware for undergraduate school, he worked his summers with the State Planning Office. One of the jobs that himself and another gentleman who was also going to college, was to drive around in a car and count houses. Does that ring a bell? Responding to Mr. Witham, Mr. Thomas stated that they don't do that anymore.

Mr. Edgehill stated that they have the GIS data and the maps and the pictures that we can figure that out with.

Mrs. Melson-Williams stated that we did get their presentation as a pdf this afternoon and they will push that out to you so that you can have all of the great links. If there is no objection, we will also provide the State Planning Office with everyone's emails so that everyone can join their newsletter. You have probably heard us talk about PLUS. If there is an application that went through PLUS Review, we try to put that in your Development Advisory Committee review process report so some of that should have been vaguely familiar to you.

### **Progress on Implementation of 2019 Comprehensive Plan**

Mrs. Melson-Williams stated that they are kind of at the five year timeframe where there is actually a statement in *Delaware Code* that says that we should be reviewing our *Comprehensive Plan* to see if there is any items that need to be updated or if there has been substantial changes in an area. Tonight is a baby step in that direction. We have our consultation working on the annual report piece of the *Comprehensive Plan*. There are a couple of strategies that we have taken this year that she thinks will help us in the long run. Our *2019 Comprehensive Plan* was actually adopted by City Council in January 2020. Through all of our process, it was the 2019 Plan. As part of that *Comprehensive Plan*, there have been a number of things that we have done over the years. A couple of the things that she included in the packet is Table 1-2 which was the Chapter goals. If you remember with the *Comprehensive Plan*, there are a series of topic chapters in the document and each of those ends with a series of goals and then a series of recommendations with some action items associated with those. This is not just for the Planning Office to implement; it is for the City and its many departments and City Council to implement as we go about doing the work of the City. She included that but didn't really anticipate any

kind of discussion about goals. These are fairly broad and if you have a project, you can probably work it into one of these goals anyway. What she also included in the packet is Chapter 15. Chapter 15 is the Implementation Plan for the *Comprehensive Plan*. It talks about what we should be doing from the adoption process for the *Comprehensive Plan* through the timeframe for the next one that we will have to do. The *Comprehensive Plan* for the City of Dover was done in-house by Staff which is probably a little different than the images that you saw in the State Planning's presentation where some of the other have made use of consultants. This was done by Planning Staff. They had a full contingent of Staff at the time and we all kind of each tackled a chapter. The document itself is a series of chapters and then of course a series of maps. Immediate actions with a *Comprehensive Plan* is adoption and she mentioned that formally happened and was officially certified. That dated to that transition in late 2019 and then City Council did its final adoption in January 2020. The next step with a *Comprehensive Plan* is that your Zoning Map needs to match your *Comprehensive Plan*. So, the *Comprehensive Plan* has a Land Development Plan Map which is the vision for where you want certain land uses to happen in the City; that is Map 12-1. What we did in 2021 was actually do that comparison of our Zoning Map versus that Land Development Plan Map. What that identified was a process that we went through and this body was involved in; it was the Comprehensive Rezoning 2021 Project. With that, there were about 160 parcels in the City that were rezoned at that time. There was also a series of amendments done to Map 12-1 as we delved into greater detail or in some cases, the zoning was changed to something that they needed to match up the land use category with. That process was completed in 2021. The rest of Chapter 15 goes through and breaks it up into activities that are just generally ongoing in the various topic areas. Then it tries to put the projects and studies into some form of implementation. This is where in what we are having our consultant work on this year is really developing a spreadsheet to see how we are doing with this various items; because they are not all planning. Certainly our Planning Office has had our hands in a number of these things but we haven't gotten to everything of course. There is a number of studies that weren't even on this list that have happened. We want to do a check-in as to where we are. Her initial thought of *Comprehensive Plan* and having to do the five year review, it seems daunting but she is not sure that there is really much in our Plan that is that far off where we need to go back into it. She thinks that they did pretty well. They still have annexation areas; they have picked of a few things here and there. Most of our anticipated development especially here in the Downtown was envisioned for mixed use and we are starting to see that strategy come into play with projects. Certainly, our zoning is set up in some instances for that. We have done over the years a number of Ordinance changes. We have done a number of things to update parts of our *Zoning Ordinance*. Are there more to do? Yes, but she doesn't know that they are that far off from what they had identified in the *Comprehensive Plan*. This Chapter 15 also talks about how you do *Comprehensive Plan* Amendments. We have actually had three rounds of Amendments over the years since we adopted this Plan where individual property owners came forward seeking a change to the Map. Some of them were successful in getting the Land Development Map changed; others were not. We had one of those that was not successful just last year. This was to push this back in front of you. If you have particular questions or after hearing the State's presentation on what they do and knowing what we do here in the Planning Office, if there is any questions that you have or a direction that you think we should be moving to now that we are starting to have Staff onboard again. We may be able to get into some of this long range planning efforts. She knows that they have identified a number of things specifically related to the Active Recreation Area requirements and housing which they think is going to be



something that we are going to have to go into. Some of it may be dictated by the State when it comes to affordable housing and accessory dwelling units. We will see how the legislature plays out on that. At this point, she would be happy to take any questions or concerns that you may have about the *Comprehensive Plan* and how it's been going the last five-ish years.

Mr. Witham asked what the next step was in the process for the Planning Commission. Responding to Mr. Witham, Mrs. Melson-Williams stated that there is not real detail about how you go about doing the renewal or the five year review even in the State Code process. At this point, she wanted to refresh your mind about this. They have a deadline coming up in July where we have to submit our Annual Report to the State Planning Office. She would like to bring that back to the Commission after they submit it but that is going to give us a sense of where we are on some of this. Certainly, if you think over your time here on the Commission, especially over the last year, if there have been things that didn't seem to quite fit right or topic areas that we may need to look at more closely, she would like to hear those. She thinks this is going to be a little bit of a work in progress as to what a five year review for the City of Dover is going to be.

Mrs. Denney asked if they will have workshops or is that typically just done in-house with the Planning Office. Responding to Mrs. Denney, Mrs. Melson-Williams stated that there was one five year review that was really almost like rewriting the *Comprehensive Plan* a number of years ago. She doesn't see that for this time around. We have not really talked about how that review transpires. It could be as simple as a discussion at a couple of Planning Commission meetings that are public meetings but we haven't gotten that far.

Mr. Reaves stated that he is just trying to understand how they may be able to facilitate this. When we have a project that is affecting a common interest in the community, is it possible that we can have the notice to go out to more than just a residential property that is within 250 feet of the project? Sometimes projects affect the entire community and not just one home in the community. That may be a little bit off topic but if we can try to understand how to incorporate something like that. Responding to Mr. Reaves, Mrs. Melson-Williams stated that the public notice requirement for applications that must appear before this body, our Historic District Commission and the Board of Adjustment Committee by Code, have that 200 feet distance and then direct mailing. The other ways of public notice are the legal ads in the public newspaper and then for both the Planning Commission and the Historic District Commission, the physical posting of the property which is the bright yellow sign. That was added to our Code a number of years ago to cover that broader community because you are always going to be just a foot away from somebody else in doing a mailed notice. If it is something of concern, it would be something that Staff would look at. She knows in the past, there have been ideas of making it bigger than 200 feet. That is fairly consistent in most jurisdictions. The problem is that 200 feet in some areas gets you to a list that is very short but in other areas like Downtown, you could have ones that have over 50-100 properties within that distance. It is somewhat of a balancing act when it comes to that public notice. They can certainly note that as anything process-wise that they may need to look into to see what our options are.

These were all information presentations to the Commission. Your agenda does include an opportunity for Planning Commissioner comments if there is anyone who had additional

comments, questions, or concerns.

Mrs. Denney stated that she thought this was a great workshop, especially the stuff from the State Planning Office. It was very informative. She has a position both with the City and also with the County and she often refers to what the Office of State Planning thinks. She thinks it is very helpful.

Dr. Jones stated that she would like to thank Mrs. Melson-Williams and the State Planning Office because she too has probably mentioned the workshops in the past and the lunch hour workshops that we used to have. This has been very informative.

Mr. Witham stated thank you to all of the presenters tonight. It is important for us to hear these reports. It helps us in terms of performing our public duty and it is certainly very informative for the public. He thanks the Planning Commission for their hard work in making this possible for us.

**Meeting adjourned at 8:56 PM.**

**Sincerely,**

**Kristen Mullaney**  
**Secretary**