

CITY OF DOVER

HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION FEBRUARY 20, 2025

The Meeting of the City of Dover Historic District Commission was held on Thursday, February 20, 2025, at 3:30 PM as an In-Person Meeting in the City Hall Council Chambers (anchor location) and virtually using the videoconferencing system Webex. With Chairman Czerwinski presiding, the other members present were Ms. Horsey, Mrs. Richardson, and Mrs. Mason. (There is currently one member not appointed.)

Planning Office Staff members present were Mrs. Melson-Williams, Mrs. Duca, and Mrs. Savage-Purnell.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Mrs. Mason moved for approval of the agenda as presented, seconded by Mrs. Richardson, and the vote was unanimously carried 4-0.

ADOPTION OF MINUTES OF THE REGULAR HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION MEETING OF DECEMBER 19, 2024

Ms. Horsey moved for approval of the Meeting Minutes of December 19, 2024, with any necessary corrections, seconded by Mrs. Richardson, and approved 4-0.

COMMUNICATIONS & REPORTS

Summary of Applications 2024

Mrs. Melson-Williams mentioned that a Summary of the Applications from the calendar year 2024 were included in your packet. In that year, you reviewed a total of 9 applications. The summary chart gives when you took action and then kind of the current status of a number of those items. The Mobility Center Parking Garage project was heard by the Planning Commission in January and was granted conditional approval including Site Plan and Architectural Review Certification. The Legislative Hall Building Addition project, likewise, has been through Planning Commission and is working through their Final Plan approval processes at this point. And then if you have not been in the area of the Kent County Family Courthouse project this week, they have started to set the concrete panels with the Parking Garage, hence the very large crane that is now gracing part of Downtown Dover.

Mrs. Melson-Williams asked if there were any questions. There were none.

Summary of Architectural Review Certifications for 2024-2025

Mrs. Melson-Williams stated that this is where we track all Permit activity in the Historic District area. For 2024, there were a total of 32 Permits in the Historic District. A good number of them were related to signage with roofs coming in second for the year. This also includes Building Permits for exterior work, which are subject to Architectural Review Certification. There were some interior work permits, but those are not subject to that process.

Additionally, there were other permits for fencing and Administration Permits, a temporary sign, and a Demolition activity. Of those permits (total of 32), most of them were eligible for Staff Review with three of them involving the Historic District Commission.

Mrs. Melson-Williams asked if there were any questions. There were none.

Mrs. Melson-Williams stated that we also included the Summary of the Architecture Review Certification with the permit activity for the month of January here in 2025. There were two Permits that were issued in the Historic District. One of them was related to the property at 21 North American Avenue, which you saw the referral of that permit in October or November. The Demolition Permit for 148 S. Bradford Street was issued in January. The demolition of that particular building has progressed.

Mrs. Melson-Williams asked if there were any questions. There were none.

Mrs. Richardson asked if a Demolition Permit was submitted for 150 S. Bradford Street. Mrs. Melson-Williams replied, I am not sure yet because the current tenant in that building is obviously having to relocate and I don't think the relocation spot is quite ready yet. We see a lot of permits, so I'm not sure if there was one submitted. It has not been issued yet.

Department of Planning & Inspections Updates

Mrs. Melson-Williams mentioned that we have not added any additional Staff to fill our vacancies at this point in the Planning Office. We do have Consultant Services for planning activities from the Rossi Group. They are assisting with a number of planning review processes related to plans and permitting for us at the present time.

NEW APPLICATION

HI-25-01 The Old Post at 55 Loockerman Plaza - Public Hearing and Review for Recommendation on Architectural Review Certification for redevelopment of the Old Dover Post Office property consisting of 1.267 acres for a mixed-use project known as The Old Post. The project involves the demolition of the rear warehouse portion of the existing building and adaptive re-use of the front 4,560 SF portion of the building for commercial retail and business space. A three-story 31,500 SF building addition is proposed for thirty-six (36) residential apartment units and with parking and other site improvements. The property is zone C-2 (Central Commercial Zone), subject to the SWPOZ (Source Water Protection Overlay Zone), and subject to the H (Historic District Zone). The property is located on the north side of Loockerman Plaza and adjacent to Innovation Way. The owner of record is the City of Dover and equitable owner is Old Post, LLC. Property Address: 55 Loockerman Plaza. Tax Parcel: ED-05-077.05-04-53.00-000. Council District 4.

Mrs. Melson-Williams stated that this is the project known as the Old Post at 55 Lockerman Plaza. This is the location of the former Dover Post Office. The building is there at the intersection of Loockerman Plaza and Innovation Way. Innovation Way is on the east side of the building and on the plan shown here it is the street that would be at the top of the page.

This property at 55 Loockerman Plaza is just over 1.2 acres in size, and it currently has the vacant building that served as the former Dover Post Office before their relocation to a new facility on Bank Lane a few years ago. With this project, they are proposing a project to renovate and then add on to this existing building to create a mixed-use, commercial building that also includes multi-family housing in the form of apartments. The property is zoned C-2 which is our Central Commercial Zone. The property also falls within the Source Water Protection Overlay Zone. However, there are exemptions for properties in the Downtown related to that zoning district. Today the Historic District Commission will be considering the Architectural Review Certification and a recommendation on that. This application is also subject to a Site Plan application that will be reviewed by the Planning Commission. And as such the Planning Commission will have the final action on the Architectural Review Certification ultimately.

The Post Office Building was constructed in the 1960s here for this version of the post office building, as it's been several different places here in these few blocks. Most recently that function relocated. The property and building is owned by the City of Dover and the City of Dover issued a RFP (Request for Proposal). The applicants before you were the successful person or entity that will be purchasing the property from the City and redeveloping it. The existing building has a very classical pedimented front entry that you can see from Loockerman Plaza and then extends continuously to the north with a kind of a warehouse section of the building which was previously the kind of back of house mail processing facility. With their project proposal, it does involve a partial demolition and that would be a demolition of the rear warehouse portion of the building. This proposed demolition would keep the front portion of the building intact and then reutilize that space, which is a two-story area for the commercial side of things. Where the building is demolished is where the new building addition would be constructed and that is a three-story addition, to consist of a series of apartment units on the interior. With the project, they are also making improvements for the parking. The portions of the parking lot/loading area that exists today will continue and then additional parking expanded along the west side of the property. There are sidewalks along the frontages and other sidewalk connections that will be improved with the project. This plan sheet here shows tree planting and landscaping. This was an extra sheet that we provided to the Historic District Commission members with a hard copy on their desks today. From the Historic District Commission standpoint, you are looking at the review of the *Design Standards and Guidelines for the City of Dover Historic District Zone*. So, there are portions of Chapter 3, which deal with the maintenance, repair, preservation and restoration of existing historic buildings, and then also Chapter 4 where new construction additions, demolition, and relocation are described. With demolition, there are a series of criteria to consider and they in fact with this application are showing us what would be demolished and then also what would be put back in place. With the Report, the Planning Staff beginning on page seven have issued a number of comments and recommendations. We are recommending conditional approval of the Architectural Review Certification, finding the building to be of a compatible design with the nearby buildings. It does include the preservation of the key frontage piece of the building on Loockerman Plaza fitting in with the context of the area. Certainly, the new addition takes clues from the surrounding architecture as well since it is proposed to be in brick.

Representative: Mr. Mike Glick, Lighthouse Construction

Mr. Glick stated that he was also a member of the development team for the proposed redevelopment of the Old Post. With me today is Lauren Townsend, Design and Development Manager with Lighthouse Construction.

Presentation

Dawn has done a nice job explaining our vision of the project before you today, so I will be brief. We are proposing a renovation and addition of the former Post Office site located at 55 Loockerman Plaza into a mixed-use, commercial retail, and multi-family facility before you and referred to as the Old Post. For over 50 years, 55 Loockerman Plaza was a hub and an institution within Dover's community. Many of us have memories of how this building played an important role in our lives. Over the past year, I've heard many stories about their first jobs, grabbing a hot dog from the local street vendor as a kid, or for me taking my daughters there to get their very first passport many years ago. Given this connection with the community, we have chosen to keep the primary structure of along Loockerman to help hopefully celebrate the next fifty years. The rear of the structure where we refer to as the warehouse and the loading docks is proposed to be demolished to provide additional parking adjacent to the existing Library parking and constructing a new three-story multi-family building (addition) of 36 apartments. This image here is of the existing with the additional frontage and access to the streets. You can see the apartment structure that we are proposing to the rear. Reviewing the Downtown Dover historic structures, we look to respect and reflect the historical architecture rather than replicate it with the renovation and addition to the Old Post. We look at the aesthetic nature of brick and glass and the use of limestone along the base of the structures and entrances. We have provided the next two slides which are the view of the intersection from Loockerman and Innovation Way to show you both before and after. Then a view at the entry to the Library, where you can see both before and after with minimal impact to the Loockerman Plaza frontage. The proposed design retains much of the existing facade while introducing modern elements for improved pedestrian connection to the Loockerman streetscape. We preserve the existing columns in the portico structure but increased the fenestration of the ground level to improve the pedestrian engagement with the retail and outdoor seating component of the structure. The new construction portion of the building houses the multi-family residential area of the mixed-use development. The addition is set back to allow increased density while maintaining the light and open feel of Loockerman Plaza. The design of the apartments aims to compliment the institutional fabric of the Capital Square context of East Loockerman while bringing in pedestrian scale design elements of the West Loockerman corridor. The exterior material palette reflects the surrounding architecture consisting of red brick in a brick bond pattern, a limestone style EFIS, and painted accents and trims. We utilize architectural details, typically of buildings Downtown such as piers, cornices, and banding to create articulation on the façade while proposing a series of Juliet balconies for each apartment, to allow the residents to engage with the streetscape while utilizing the rhythmic use of brick and glass commonly seen throughout the Downtown historic structures. The cornice of the proposed structure is a three-tiered brick detail shown on the next slide to provide relief without competing with the detailed dental moulding of the existing former Post Office. The west side (the Library elevation) of the proposed structure is a continuation of the rhythmic of Juliet balconies, glass and brick, and limestone flanked by the existing structure remain. The north or rear of the building facing the parking lot is adorned with brick and limestone. We

received the Planning Staff's comments regarding additional details along the rear of the structure. While it acknowledges the rear of the building, we will work with the City Planning Staff and study other similar structures in Dover to ensure we complement the area. With that, we would like to thank the Planning Staff for their review of the project and acknowledge their comments. We remain committed to working with the Staff in each of those comments to ensure a positive outcome for the project. I'll be happy to answer any questions regarding the project.

Mrs. Melson-Williams noted that the applicant submitted a follow-up letter dated February 18, 2025 where they went through the series of Staff Comments and Recommendations and reacted to those. So, in some cases it provided some additional information. Mr. Glick noted specifically the question that we had about the upper cornice of the building addition with a graphic that's shown on the screen here and then also within that letter. That letter was provided to you and was also available on your desk this afternoon. Chairman Czerwinski asked if everyone had seen the letter showing the cornice and the other answers to the notes.

Chair Czerwinski asked if there were any other questions.

Ms. Horsey mentioned that she's sat on a lot of these Commissions and seen submissions. It's nice to see that you took the forethought to print out the questions and recommendations from Staff and answer them. It was good to read them.

I think it was yesterday or this morning when they came electronically, but to have it now in print form is really nice.

Mr. Glick replied you are welcome. Staff do a great job reviewing so we wanted to answer their questions. Ms. Horsey, thank you for that.

Ms. Horsey had a question on the overall height of the new addition. It's two feet taller than the original building. Is there a reason it needs to be taller than the original?

Mr. Glick replied in accommodating the three stories of apartments, we require an additional two feet. We didn't feel it was not substantial. At the same time, the rooftop will have mechanical units on it. So, we wanted to ensure that the parapet height was of such a height that it would have screening so you can't see it. As you can see from the elevations and renderings, you cannot see any of the rooftop equipment, which was also important for us.

Ms. Horsey mentioned well that it was her next question to follow up, but you answered it. So, actually the very top couple of feet are a parapet to disguise on top of the building. Mr. Glick replied yes ma'am.

Ms. Horsey questioned the front on either end of the main entrance, there's what is proposed to be a glass kind of enclosure for a large opening. Mr. Glick replied that it is correct, yes.

Ms. Horsey asked how would that work? Because the way that it's presented, it looks like there's just two big black holes. Mr. Glick replied we would propose using if you're familiar with a Nano-wall system or others as a folding glass door; so it works. What we're proposing is essentially working from those existing windows. So, everything from the existing windows and

between them would be removed and it is a large series of folding glass doors. When closed it would look like a series of doors, and when opened it would just be a large open space that would then connect the interior to the exterior. Our ultimate goal is for a restaurant tenant that would have both interior and outdoor seating, and this is in preparation for that.

Ms. Horsey asked if most of the time they would be closed, is that right? Mr. Glick replied that at this time of year they would be. Ms. Horsey said well, I know, but just trying to get an idea. Mr. Glick replied yeah, typically we see these in restaurants with garage doors, but this is from an architectural perspective, a better application for the frontage along Lookerman.

Typically, in these applications from April to November depending on our shoulder seasons the doors can be open. The nice part is they can be open in the afternoons, closed in the mornings and evenings, and depending on the weather, so try to utilize that outdoor environment as much as possible. Ms. Horsey said thank you.

Mrs. Richardson mentioned that she noticed that the first floor of the addition has a limestone façade whereas everything above it has a brick façade. Is there a reason for the limestone versus the brick? Mr. Glick replied given the height of the structure and the residential nature of it, we wanted to try to reduce the feeling of the overall height of the structure. We felt that if we blended the first floor of limestone finish and then brick above, otherwise it would have been a big brick box. So, we tried to break up that facade and compliment the area.

Mrs. Mason asked about the tenants in the building. I know that these are all going to be apartments and not condominiums and strictly for renters. I didn't know what sort of research had been going on. Would you have a certain tenant with special opportunities for apartments that are very affordable? I know you are doing most of the construction, but I don't know what sort of studies have been done on how this will work as a rental building.

Mr. Glick replied we have had a market study done on demand here in Dover to ensure that obviously if we build it, we want to make sure we fill it. It is a market rate apartment; so it is at market rate. Certainly, as things progress and the conversations that we have had, it is market rate apartments.

Mrs. Mason said I think it's a great location and I am glad that you're doing it. I think it should be very successful. Mr. Glick said thank you.

Chairman Czerwinski said that he really did not have any questions about the architectural details. He appreciates Staff notes because they are very detailed and very thoughtful. I do appreciate the sensitivity of how this building was constructed and designed. The rehab of these buildings is always the toughest bit of any design element for an architectural structure. You have to be able to keep that part. The rear part is complimentary, and it sets back. As far as height is concerned, I am not really concerned about the height because I think the overall height of this building is probably the same as the peak of the library or very close.

If you look at massing, they are going to be pretty much equivalent to each other from the eye. I do appreciate the thought that was put into this building. I think the open front is awesome because I think they introduced the European aspect to the façade. And of course, those windows

close. So, when those windows are closed, it's going to look just like the rest of the building as far as the massing or the windows design. So, I do appreciate it.

Chair Czerwinski asked if there were any other questions.

Chair Czerwinski said thank you very much. I appreciate it. Thank you. Do you have anybody else that wants to speak on behalf of the company? Mr. Glick said no.

The public hearing is open.

Mr. Todd Stonesifer stated that he resides at 115 North State Street. I am currently the Board Chair for the Downtown Dover Partnership, and I am here to represent the Downtown Dover Partnership. While you may not believe this, the Downtown Dover Partnership absolutely has a mission of retaining the history as much as we can. I know we had some discussions that may seem to the contrary in this room. We are here fully in support of the Lighthouse team and their designs. The activity that they are going to create, we believe will activate the Downtown area and will provide people living, working, and playing Downtown, which will have an effect on retaining the history in The Green, in our other Downtown, and Loockerman Street corridor. The more people we put here, the better chance we have of creating activity where the neighborhood in itself will create improvements to their existing buildings and improve on bringing buildings back to life. We are fully in support. We love the idea of activating the outside. We love the fact that they have retained the overall identity of the building. We think that it is a great addition to the efforts to restore Downtown. I can answer questions.

Chairman Czerwinski asked if there was anyone else that would wish to speak. If not, then we will move online.

The public hearing was closed seeing no one wishing to speak in the room or virtually.

Chairman Czerwinski asked if there was anyone else with questions or concerns. There was none.

Mrs. Melson-Williams stated that there was no written correspondence.

Chairman Czerwinski stated that I think it is a straightforward design, and I really liked the Staff notes. There was a lot more sensitivity in the Staff notes in catching a lot of the details that we would be asking about. Like the cornice detail, because we have had that in the past where some of these buildings were quite brutalistic and lacking external details. We've had issues with that in the past. I really appreciate the Staff notes identifying the lack of a cornice and lack of some details of the building.

Ms. Horsey moved for approval of the Architectural Review Certification for Application HI-25-01 The Old Post at 55 Loockerman Plaza as presented including the elements of Staff notes, review comments and recommendation found in the Report. It was seconded by Mrs. Richardson and approved 4-0.

NEW BUSINESS**Review of Permits Referred to Commission**

Mrs. Melson-Williams mentioned that there were no Permits to specifically bring to the Commission today.

OLD BUSINESS**Certified Local Government (CLG) Program**

Mrs. Melson-Williams mentioned that she had nothing new to report.

Implementation of 2019 Comprehensive Plan

Mrs. Melson-Williams mentioned that with the City's Downtown Development District we are working on an implementation aspect of that. The City's Downtown Development District program received a five-year renewal. The Renewal Application was considered late last summer and as part of that, we are moving through an Ordinance to make some changes to the boundaries of the Downtown Development District. Since it was first established, the amount of area you can have in such a district has expanded. With our Renewal Application, we took full advantage of that and now we're doing the catch up of how that needs to be augmented in our Code. Certainly, in an upcoming meeting, once that's adopted, we'll bring you information just so you can see what those boundaries are. This project that you just reviewed is in the Downtown Development District. So, that gives them some opportunities to pursue some City Incentives, and then also there are State Rebates as part of the State level aspects of the Downtown Development District program.

We can certainly report to you with a little more information just as a learning experience for you on that in the future.

Chairman Czerwinski asked if anyone had any questions.

Chairman Czerwinski asked about the *Design Standards and Guidelines* Addendum. He understands that we had monetary issues and the issues of trying to appropriate the funds for Grants and be able to do that kind of legwork. Is there any possibility we can employ an intern from the University of Delaware or Delaware State University that could possibly do that as a project? I do not know if that is something that has been done in the past. It might be an opportunity for an undergraduate or a graduate student to do a short addendum that we could use as a tool. You know, they could do the research and maybe present that to us. It's just an idea that might take some of the legwork or hard work away from trying to get a contractor and money and that sort of thing and have an intern do it instead.

Mrs. Melson-Williams said I mean it is certainly something that Staff could take under advisement, but at the present time I would say we are trading water and given the current staffing levels in our office, at least for this foreseeable future. Our proposed budget for FY'26, which would start in July, did retain at least at the present time in the draft that we submitted. Some money should there be a Grant opportunity to continue that to match.

But at this present time, it's not necessarily a priority that we are pursuing given our staffing levels in general.

Mrs. Richardson asked if they could retain the drawings. Mrs. Melson-Williams replied that you may retain those drawings. I know I had to collect some things in the past because they were governmental buildings. So, you are welcome to retain these.

Chairman Czerwinski asked if there were any questions or comments before we adjourn?

Mrs. Richardson moved to adjourn the meeting seeing no other items of business, seconded by Mrs. Mason, and unanimously carried 4-0 of the members present.

Meeting adjourned at 4:13 PM

Sincerely,

Maretta Savage-Purnell
Secretary