

CITY OF DOVER

HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION

MAY 15, 2025

The Meeting of the City of Dover Historic District Commission was held on Thursday, May 15, 2025, at 3:54 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 Mrs. Richardson and Mrs. Mason (virtual). Ms. Horsey was absent. (There is currently one member not appointed.)

The Planning Office Staff members present were Mrs. Melson-Williams, Mr. Salzano, and Mrs. Savage-Purnell.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Mrs. Richardson moved for approval of the agenda as presented, seconded by Chairman Czerwinski and the vote was unanimously carried 3-0. Ms. Horsey was absent.

ADOPTION OF MINUTES OF THE REGULAR HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION MEETING OF FEBRUARY 20, 2025

Mrs. Richardson moved for approval of the Meeting Minutes of February 20, 2025, with any necessary corrections, seconded by Chairman Czerwinski, and approved 3-0. Ms. Horsey was absent.

COMMUNICATIONS & REPORTS

Summary of Applications 2024 and 2025

Mrs. Melson-Williams mentioned that you have considered a series of nine (9) Applications over the course of 2024, and today we have another Application. Technically it's numbered the third Application for 2025. One of the other Applications for 2025 is still pending its appearance before the Commission. The Summary Chart gives the status number of those projects from 2024. Those Applications are underway or moving through additional processes to finalize the Application Site Plan approvals.

Mrs. Melson-Williams asked if there were any questions on the Applications from the last two years? There was none.

Summary of Architectural Review Certifications for 2025

Mrs. Melson-Williams stated that this is where we track all Permit activity in the Historic District area by the Building Permits filed. A number of the permits are eligible for Staff review of that Architectural Review Certification and in other cases, the Historic District Commission was involved in their review process. Through the end of April, at this point, there have been twelve (12) Permit Applications in the Historic District area. The significant tally this time is for Roof Permits. A lot of those are basically reviewed by Staff and in most cases, you can't see the roof that is being worked on because they are flat roofs here in the Downtown. We have also seen two (2) Demolition Permits. Those were ones related to Applications that appeared before

this body. Those being those two properties on South Bradford Street. There have been two Sign Permits, a Window Permit, and a Building Exterior and an Interior Permit.

Staff were able to review a total of nine of those and three involved the Historic District Commission as part of the review process.

Mrs. Melson-Williams asked if there were any questions on the permit activity. There was none.

Department of Planning & Inspections Updates

Mrs. Melson-Williams mentioned that she had good news of a new Planner II, Chris Salzano who has been with us for a month yesterday. We welcome Chris. He actually worked on the review of this project. We will hear from him in a bit. Other information from the Department of Planning and Inspections, we do have a number of vacancies as there are other employment opportunities as well across the City that are open. Please visit the City's website to find out more information about how you can join the team here at Dover. I will say this on behalf of the Code Enforcement Division; it's time to cut your grass. The City has the ability to issue violations if your grass is 8 inches in height or a greater. In other items of interest, the City Council held their Annual Meeting in May and as part of that Chairman Czerwinski was reappointed to continue on another term here with the Historic District Commission. We still await approval for the appointment of the fifth member of the Commission.

NEW APPLICATION

HI-25-03 Biggs Museum Expansion: Select Removals at 15 and 21 The Green – Public Hearing and Review of the Architectural Review Certification for the selective removal of portions of the buildings located at 15 and 21 The Green as associated with future renovation and expansion of the Biggs Museum of American Art. The proposal includes the selective dismantling of a fire escape at 15 The Green and selective demolition of the rear two-story addition, basement and associated fire escape at 21 The Green. The properties total 0.2 acres+/- and are both zoned IO (Institutional and Office Zone) and subject to the SWPOZ (Source Water Protection Overlay Zone) and the H (Historic District Zone). The subject properties are located on the northeastern side of The Green, south of East North Street and east of South State Street. The owner of record is the Sewell C Biggs Trust dba Biggs Museum of American Art. Property Addresses: 15 and 21 The Green. Tax Parcels: ED05-077.09-05-19.00-000 and ED05-077.09-05-18.00-000. Council District 4.

Mr. Chris Salzano stated that this application before you is HI-25-03 Biggs Museum Expansion: Select Removals at 15 and 21 The Green. These structures are located on The Green in the Dover Green National Register Historic District. Both properties are owned by the Sewell C. Biggs Trust, and the lots total 0.2 acres combined. The structures have changed over time with both expansions being added in the past hundred years. The proposal before you today is a request to selectively remove the rear addition at 21 The Green and the fire escape at 15 The Green. The project intends on preserving the original façades of 15 and 21 The Green. All removable work is limited to the rear of the structures. The Historic District Commission is charged with evaluating the proposals against the *Design Standards and Guidelines for the City of Dover Historic District Zone*, specifically the standards in Chapter 4 regarding demolition. Staff has provided review

comments for this project starting on page 6 of the DAC Report. With that, I'm going to hand it over to the Applicant to add any additional information.

Mrs. Melson-Williams noted that the Architectural Review Staff Report was included and provided to the applicant and to the Historic District Commission members as was what we call their architectural narrative packet which consisted of text and a series of images.

We do have that entire packet here. Chris just pulled a couple of images to the front to help explain what's going on here. Maybe if you want to back up one slide so we can see where we're talking about, and we'll turn it over to your Director. You can identify yourself for the record and proceed.

Representative: Mr. Hassan Najjar, Executive Director of the Biggs Museum of American Art
Presentation

Mr. Najjar stated that they are really excited about this project at 15-21 The Green. I think most of you know historic buildings if left empty and unintended are the fast track to demolition and destruction. Thankfully, that will not be the case here with 15-21 The Green. We are working on some very exciting Plans for these buildings so that not only do they contribute to The Green itself but also contribute to the City of Dover. Behind me I've got Staff, Board, and volunteers who have been working tirelessly on this project. I want to thank them for doing that. We will continue to work on this as we move into fruition, but I also want to recognize the folks that have joined us online. It is the award-winning Smith Group who prepared a lot of the materials that you see today. I am not going to sit here and rehash everything that's in the package because you have it in front of you, but certainly we will be here to answer any questions. Our folks online will also be able to answer any questions that you may have. And again, thank you for hearing from us today.

Chairman Czerwinski said thank you. He asked Mr. Najjar if this concludes the presentation as far as the project is concerned. Mr. Najjar replied yes.

Chairman Czerwinski asked if any other members have any questions about their presentation or anything about the project? Mrs. Richardson replied no, I have read the package thoroughly. Mrs. Mason also replied no.

Mrs. Dawn Melson-Williams mentioned she wanted to recognize the members of the project team that joined us online this afternoon for this meeting. There are three individuals from the SmithGroup that joined us online and that includes Jim Shepherd, Grace Lee and Eleanor Choy. Additionally, there is Carl Freedman who I believe acts on behalf of the museum as part of the project and then I think one other member of your Board has also joined us. I would actually suggest that we ask the Smith Group if there's anything in particular you want to highlight regarding this request today. Now would be an opportunity for you to talk a little bit about the project and your efforts to bring this to us today.

Mr. Shepherd stated that he was happy to speak on behalf of the Smith Group. I'm the Director of Historic Preservation and the Vice President at SmithGroup. We have been involved with the project for some time. This package is to recommend the dismantling of the rear part of 21 The Green. It's a by-product of a Master Plan that we had worked on with the Biggs Museum that looked at not only these two historic structures, but also their main museum. With the longer process of integrating these two historic structures into the museum as a part of a future design exercise, there's been a lot of effort and thought and documentation that had gone into that Master Plan. A by-product which was to do some additional historic research to better understand the evolution of 15 and 21 The Green. We did have Robinson and Associates join our team at that time as an enabling study that fed into the recommendations in our submittal. They did some extensive research on the evolution of both buildings. The history started from their 1859 construction and tracked their changes over time to present day. One of the things that was a byproduct of the Master Plan was a planning of a footprint and expansion for the Biggs Museum that could link to these historic buildings. Through our studies, it made us realize the existing conditions and restrictions of the Historic District and that an obvious place for expansion that would minimize visual impact in that area was behind the historic buildings. One of the things that was limiting was the extension of 21 The Green. We did want to make sure we thoroughly documented and understood what the addition was because we very much understood the proximity to The Green and the definition of the Historic District and the fact that these two buildings contributed to it. I think through our findings of the historical resource research, we did find that that backside of the building had been changed over time. It started as a woodshed and then was added onto in the 1920s and expanded further. With the two buildings and their components, the backside of 21 The Green had the least amount of integrity and really lacked the characteristics that contributed to the criteria that was the reason why these two buildings were listed as part of the Historic District. Our document really walks through it clearly. Both are the reasoning for why we are asking for this. A pretty clean and concise definition of what we are removing is the back portion of 21 The Green and its fire escape. At some point, a fire escape was added to 15 The Green because of the need for egress as a result of the upper floors being used as office space. We are asking for the removal of that as well with the intent that with a future designed expansion that would connect these buildings to the Biggs Museum. There would be a total Plan for an accessible elevator and stair that could link all of these. I think you've already showed the Plan. I think the elevations make it clear as to what we are removing. The impact of the Plan shows a very clear and concise removal and the impact of what will remain when that removal happens. I do want to emphasize that obviously we did a lot of review analysis of the removal of this and tried to make it clear that what we are removing doesn't really from The Green impact the visual appearance of the historic buildings at all. We are making sure and thinking through the next steps of the concept design which will come after we have gotten approval for the removal of this. It will take into consideration these historic buildings and how we best integrate them. This concludes what I have to say. Thank you for the opportunity to share our research and recommendations.

Chairman Czerwinski asked if the Board members had any additional questions or comments?

Mrs. Richardson asked about the existing fire escape that is being removed. Is that currently in use? Mr. Shepherd replied yes, just to be clear, we are asking for approval for the removal of these two items with the intent that obviously before these can be removed, we need to go

through a design process to design an addition that would provide proper egress and accessibility that replaces the removal of those fire escapes.

The removal will not happen until the design is complete. We are seeking approval of the removal so that we can move forward for the next phase of the design, at which point we know that we do need to come back to you with our Concept Design for approval.

Mrs. Richardson asked once it's removed, will there be any danger? I mean, there are people on the 3rd floor. If there is a fire what is going to happen if you have to wait. Mr. Shepherd replied, to clarify, we are seeking the removal of this so we can move forward with the next phase of the design. The removal will be the first phase of construction as part of the expansion, at which point we will be integrating a new stair and elevator. Part of the overall construction which will be phased is the removal of this and the installation of an addition that will accommodate the elevator and stairs that will address the accessibility and egress. There will be no time when the fire escape is removed, but the design and construction hasn't happened; if that's clear.

Mr. Carl Freedman asked to go back to the slide that shows the Master Plan addition so that we can clarify the stairs. You're seeing on the slide that there's a new stair tower and elevator component that reaches up behind 15 The Green which is going to provide the egress in the future, but we need to understand that we can have the removals of the addition behind 21 The Green before we can design these additions. None of the demolition of the existing buildings will occur until we're ready to construct the new additions.

Mrs. Richardson said thank you, that answers my question.

Chairman Czerwinski asked Mrs. Mason if she had any questions or concerns or questions to the members.

Mrs. Melson-Williams mentioned that just for the record, she wanted to note that the last speaker was Mr. Carl Freedman. He was identifying a little more detail about the timeframe for the project.

Mrs. Mason mentioned that she was following along. She apologizes for being slow to respond. She understands what was said and it is very helpful. Forgive me for being a little slow.

Mrs. Melson-Williams said thank you, Mary. We appreciate you being here so we can keep moving forward.

Mrs. Mason said yeah, and I'm glad I'm here too because when I grew up, I loved that building. It was back in the old days when we used to roller skate around there. I think it's a beautiful building. I hope that they preserve the great qualities of the building, which I'm sure they will.

I guess that's something that we will hear more about because what we're looking at right now, this is basically just for the kind of fire escape, is that correct? Chairman Czerwinski replied it's

the demolition portion of the remodeling and the demolition is the building addition and fire escape. Mrs. Mason said okay.

The public hearing is open.

Chairman Czerwinski asked if there was anyone who would like to speak.

Ms. Deborah Hanson-109 Coleman Avenue-Lewes DE

I am a former resident of the City of Dover about 35 years ago before moving to Lewes, Delaware. I serve on the Historic District Commission in Lewes, Delaware.

I'm very familiar with this process. I did want to speak on behalf of this Application. I'm a board member of the Biggs Museum and I also serve on the Building Committee. We have been very thoughtful in this process and have been working with the SmithGroup. Our other partners have also been thoughtful to the extent that we've tried to engage in the community, not only to ascertain the needs of the Dover area, the Kent County area and the greater Delmarva peninsula; and how we can serve those many people.

When we had an opportunity to explore acquiring these two buildings, we were very excited because as you know, a portion of the Biggs Museum of American Art is a historic building and then it was added onto as the Visitor Center. We have done this in the past; we have been able to integrate successfully the old with the new. We believe that we are up to the task of doing this again. Commissioner Mary Mason, I wanted to just acknowledge your comment about what a beautiful building this is and that it is absolutely intent of the Building Committee to honor the beauty of these buildings. By honoring the history, I think it just preserves them for more time to come so there's a longer time for people to enjoy them, especially in this prominent position on The Green. So again, I'm speaking in favor of this and would ask you to consider this in a positive light. Thank you.

Chairman Czerwinski asked if there was anyone who would like to speak.

Mr. Dan Houghtaling -27 Clearview Drive – Dover DE

I am very much in favor of this project. I love Old Dover. I taught Civil Engineering Architecture for 25 years at Del Tech. I love historic structures, and I really get upset when you do something to them that changes them. If you look at the façade of the two buildings, nothing is being done to change that appearance whatsoever. It ties in with the building on the end. Everything looks good. The building behind it really has no architectural value whatsoever; it has very little history to it. It's wooden and it's not in great shape. The cost of new mechanical systems, sprinkler systems, and just rehabbing the building would be excessive to get it to be used as part of the museum. The layout within those buildings is not conducive to the flow and safety of people going through. So, I am very much in favor of it.

Mr. Charles Salkin-15 Maple Lane-Dover DE

I have been nearly a 50-year resident of the City of Dover.

I have been on the Building Committee of the Biggs Museum since maybe before it started. I was asked to offer some advice about this project based on my experience when I was working. And one of the first things I said was that, of course, I knew that these buildings would be saved. One of my major concerns was how this building would tie in as the previous speaker mentioned sensitively and thoughtfully. I explained the process that we would need to go through with the City, starting with the Historic District Commission and here we are. I think that the team, the professional Staff, the consultants from a variety of different fields, and the Building Committee made up of Board members and volunteers have been very sensitive to this issue from the very beginning. In retrospect, I cannot think of any way we could have done more or gathered more information or been more prepared to explain why not only this can be removed, but it should be removed so that the essential buildings that face The Green can be permanently preserved and the Biggs Museum as an institution can thrive and ensure that those buildings will be retained for a long time. I have been the in-house critic through this whole process to make sure that we were ready for this day and I believe we are. I encourage you to act positively on this recommendation.

Chairman Czerwinski asked if there was anyone who would like to speak in person or on-line.

Mrs. Melson-Williams mentioned if you have joined us online, certainly take this opportunity to unmute and we can take your statement.

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

Mrs. Mary Mason mentioned that she thinks the project is a great idea. She loves the Biggs Museum, and she would like to see it continue to flourish. She loves those buildings, and she thinks the designs and the people who are orchestrating this seem to really know what they are doing. She is a hundred percent for this project.

Chairman Czerwinski mentioned that his thoughts are pretty much the same. I mean, we're looking at an addition that has very low architectural value. It's off the back and you cannot see it from the street. We are not talking about an issue with the façade. We obviously have a complete building that was as-built. It's always great to see we have reuse in our buildings. No argument from me.

Mrs. Richardson moved for approval of the Architectural Review Certification HI-25-03 Biggs Museum Expansion: Select Removals at the rear of 15 and 21 The Green to include the comments and recommendations presented by the Staff of the Planning Commission. It was seconded by Chairman Czerwinski and approved 3-0. Ms. Horsey was absent.

Roll Call Vote

Mrs. Mason -Yes

Mrs. Richardson - Yes

Chairman Czerwinski -Yes

Mrs. Melson-Williams mentioned that the aspect of designing the connection between the buildings would likewise be subject to a Historic District Commission review application in the future, and also a Planning Commission Site Development Plan review process as well. The Staff will work with the applicant to have them understand what that process involves as they as they move forward. We stand as a reference to how that happens and how you file those applications. Likewise, one of the items I will note that in our recommendations, we recognized the significant amount of research on these two buildings that has already occurred. We would certainly recommend that the information be provided to the Delaware Division of Historic and Cultural Affairs, otherwise known as the State Historic Preservation Office, so that it can be made part of their records in the Delaware Cultural Resource Survey, which is where information about the historic resources throughout Delaware is gathered and held for future research and access. We can certainly assist in making that contact with the State and with the Applicants for this. They took a big step today in your action and review of the first phase. We clearly understand that these demolition and removal dismantling activities would not happen until the actual construction of an expansion is underway basically.

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 the City of Dover is a participant in that program. I have not heard any additional information regarding upcoming Grant opportunities at this point in time but certainly will keep the Historic District Commission in the loop should those opportunities arise.

Implementation of 2019 Comprehensive Plan

Mrs. Melson-Williams mentioned that there was no additional information regarding (the implementation of the 2019 Comprehensive Plan) that in particular. There continue to be a number of different studies and efforts citywide that address a number of the goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan.

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 Chairman Czerwinski, and unanimously carried 3-0 of the members present. Ms. Horsey was absent.

Meeting adjourned at 4:35 PM

Sincerely,

Maretta Savage-Purnell
Secretary