

ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW STAFF REPORT

Before Dover Historic District Commission

December 19, 2024

<u>Application:</u>	Dover Mobility Center Garage, HI-24-09
<u>Owners:</u>	Downtown Dover Development Corporation (Downtown Dover Partnership) The Downtown Dover Development Corp. – Dover Parking Authority as the (Downtown Dover Partnership) City of Dover Capital City Transformation Alliance CEI Properties LLC
<u>Location:</u>	North of Minor Street Alley between South Bradford Street and South Governors Avenue
<u>Addresses:</u>	133 S. Governors Avenue, 139 S. Governors Avenue, 145 S. Governors Avenue, 136 S. Bradford Street, 148 S. Bradford Street, and 150 S. Bradford Street, Dover
<u>Tax Parcels:</u>	ED-05-077.09-02-10.00-000, ED-05-077.09-02-09.00-000, ED-05-077.09- 02-08.00-000, ED-05-077.09-02-24.00-000, ED-05-077.09-02-25.00-00, and ED-05-077.09-02-27.00-000
<u>Additional Parcel:</u>	The adjacent parcel at 132 S. Bradford Street (ED-05-077.09-02-23.00-000 owned by City of Dover) may become part of the project area to address site improvements i.e. stormwater management, tree plantings, etc. It does not include the proposed building.
<u>Project Area:</u>	estimated at 0.8577 acres +/-
<u>Present Uses:</u>	Parking Lot and Two Residential-Style Buildings Used as Offices
<u>Proposed Use:</u>	Mobility Center Parking Garage Structure
<u>Present Zoning:</u>	C-2 (Central Commercial Zone) H (Historic District Zone)
<u>For Consideration:</u>	Architectural Review Certification

Note: This Review Report was initially prepared by Staff of the Rossi Group (under a Planning Services contract with the City of Dover). The Report was completed with additional review and editing by the City's Planning Office.

I. PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

The Historic District Commission will act on a recommendation for an Architectural Review Certificate for a Site Development Plan Application for the proposed construction of a four-story, 400-space multi-purpose garage in Downtown Dover, to be located on what is currently six parcels of land located north of Minor Street Alley, east of South Governors Avenue, and west of South Bradford Street. The approximate 0.8577 acre +/- project area includes existing surface parking lots and two residential-style buildings most recently used as office space. The property is zoned C-2 (Central Commercial Zone) and is subject to H (Historic District Zone). The owners of record include the Downtown Dover Partnership; City of Dover; Capital City Transformation Alliance; and CEI Properties LLC. Property Addresses: 133 South Governors Avenue, 139 South Governors Avenue, 145 South Governors Avenue, 136 South Bradford Street, 148 South Bradford Street, and 150 South Bradford Street. Tax Parcels: ED-05-077.09-02-10.00-000, ED-05-077.09-02-09.00-000, ED-05-077.09-02-08.00-000, ED-05-077.09-02-24.00-000, ED-05-077.09-02-25.00-00, and ED-05-077.09-02-27.00-000. Council District 4.

It is noted that the adjacent parcel at 132 S. Bradford Street (ED-05-077.09-02-23.00-000 owned by City of Dover) may become part of the project area to address site improvements i.e. stormwater management, tree plantings, etc. It does not include the proposed building. In the updated submission (received December 11, 2024), this parcel is depicted as open space for a pocket park/stormwater retention area.

Surrounding Land Uses

This subject project area location north of Minor Street Alley, east of South Governors Avenue, and west of South Bradford Street is within the Downtown Development District. As previously noted, all six parcels are zoned C-2 (Central Commercial Zone). Properties immediately adjacent to the subject project location are zoned C-2 (Central Commercial Zone), with other nearby properties zoned RGO (General Residence and Office Zone). The surrounding properties are also within the H (Historic District Zone). In the remaining portions of the block to the north of the subject area are a service establishment (dry cleaner), other surface parking lots, the Dover Fire Department Station #1, a church building, and several mixed-use buildings. To the south of the Minor Street Alley are mixed-use buildings (first floor commercial or office with upper for residential uses) fronting on the West Loockerman Street, the Downtown commercial corridor.

Previous Applications

The existing surface parking lot fronting South Governors Avenue was constructed in 2007, following the demolition of buildings on the site (S-07-52, HI-07-05 and HI-06-07). Based on orthophotography, the Bradford Street parking lot was constructed sometime between 1965-1992. In May 2024, the Historic District Commission reviewed applications for Architectural Review Certification for Demolition of the two residential-style buildings located at 148 South Bradford Street (HI-24-02) and 150 South Bradford Street (HI-24-03). On May 16, 2024, the Commission passed a motion to deny both applications for Architectural Review Certificates to demolish the structures, with two members voting in favor of the motion and one member voting in opposition to the motion.

Following the denial of the Architectural Review Certificates, the applicant appealed the denial to the Planning Commission, in accordance with *Zoning Ordinance*, Article 10 - Planning Commission, Section 3 Historic District Commission and Architectural Review, Section 3.23 (D). At their meeting on June 17, 2024, the Planning Commission passed a motion to reverse the Historic District Commission's denial of the Architectural Review Certificates to demolish the structures, with four members voting in favor of the motion and two members voting in opposition to the motion. This action granted approval of the Architectural Review Certification to allow Demolition of these two buildings.

II. HISTORIC PROPERTY INFORMATION

Review of Historic Maps

A series of historic maps were reviewed by Staff for preliminary information on the area and found that between 1885 and 1919, the area was predominately residential along South Bradford Street and South Governors Avenue. By 1992, 136 S. Bradford Street had been converted into a parking lot as surrounding uses shifted to a mix of commercial, offices, and residential. Around 2006-2007 the residences along South Governors Avenue were demolished. Two historic structures remain on South Bradford Street.

Property Information

The subject property area is within the Victorian Dover Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places and is located within H (Historic District Zone) as established by the City of Dover. There are four contexts that contribute to the historic character of Dover, including the Green Historic Context; the Victorian Historic Context; the Loockerman Historic Context; and the Capitol Square Historic Context. This property is located within the Loockerman Historic Context. The *Design Standards and Guidelines for the City of Dover Historic District Zone* describe this context as "a coherent, densely-built commercial area that would have an attractive mix of historic and new buildings and related parking."

The building located at 148 S. Bradford Street is a twentieth-century, bungalow style structure that was constructed in 1930. The building located at 150 S. Bradford Street is a residential style structure and is estimated to have been constructed in the 1880s. Both structures are listed on the National Register of Historic Places as part of the Victorian Dover Historic District. Delaware's Division of Historical & Cultural Affairs identifies both as contributing properties. There are no other extant buildings in the subject area.

III. PROJECT PROPOSAL

PROJECT PROPOSAL (Submission of November 2024, and updated December 11, 2024 submission):

The application proposes construction of a Parking Garage Structure and other site improvements for the development of the Dover Mobility Center. The proposed Mobility Center is part of the centralized parking strategy proposed in the *Capital City 2030: Transforming Downtown Dover Master Plan*. The Mobility Center is also identified in the *Master Plan* as a Project Site. The project location includes the surface public parking lots fronting South Bradford Street and South

Governors Avenue, as well as the site of the two residential-style buildings for which the Planning Commission granted the Architectural Review Certificate for demolition.

The Applicant submission includes a Design Narrative, a site plan graphic, and building elevations and 3-D views. (Documents originally filed November 15, 2024 were updated with a submission of December 11, 2024 with minor design revisions.) The elements of the project are as follows:

1. Parking Garage Structure: The Parking Garage Structure is located at the lot lines of the site adjacent to Minor Street Alley, South Bradford Street, and South Governors Avenue. It is positioned at the edge of the sidewalks on South Bradford Street and South Governors Avenue. The four-story structure is being designed to include 400 parking spaces with a welcome center; public restrooms; bicycle repair shop; management office; and other support spaces on the ground level. The lower two stories of the structure are predominantly brick, while the upper stories, which are set back six feet from the lower stories, are predominantly precast concrete spandrel panels.

Exposed stair towers are located at the northwest and southeast corners of the building, where the use of glass is intended to reflect neighboring building architecture and the sky. The roof height of the northwest stair tower is 57 feet, and the roof height of the southeast stair tower is 60 feet. The ramped parking deck sits behind the building façade along the east and west elevations of the two lower stories; the ramped parking decks are visible through openings on the upper stories of west and east elevations. The south elevation includes the brick façade wrapped from the west building face and the stair tower on the east side. Between these areas, the south elevation reveals precast concrete with a parking garage appearance. The north elevation is a solid party wall for the western half of the elevation, consistent with fire code requirements, due to proximity to the property line. This area party wall is being designed to host a large mural. The remaining portion of the north elevation (the eastern half) has been revised to the precast concrete panels of the parking decks with bands of horizontal openings. Vehicle access to the garage is via entry and exit points from South Bradford Street and South Governors Avenue. Windows and double door entries are proportioned to align with neighboring buildings. Canopies are proposed to be topped with a landscaping tray system that may serve to manage stormwater runoff and visually lower the building's scale.

2. Sidewalks: As the structure will be positioned at the property lines, the sidewalk generally spans from the building to the curbline on the South Bradford Street and South Governors Avenue frontages. The application proposes expanded sidewalks at the entry points of the building and pedestrian-scale lighting along the building. The street frontage sidewalks along South Bradford Street will be brick pavers to match existing sidewalks with concrete sidewalks along South Governors Avenue. The plan proposes bike share docks along South Governors Avenue.
3. Tree Planting and Landscaping: The project plan shows some street tree plantings and grass areas between the curb and sidewalk. The project narrative mentions landscaping along the building perimeter, which is not reflected on the drawings. The drawing shows a "pocket

park/stormwater retention” area on the northeast side of the site, bounded by the parking garage and South Bradford Street on the south and east, with trees proposed to be planted in this area. This ‘pocket park’ area appears to be located on the adjacent parcel at 132 S. Bradford Street.

See the attached Design Narrative and associated graphics and drawings for detailed information on building dimensions, locations, and material choices.

In the center of the Project Area parcels is an existing Alley. It is noted that currently there is a separate Alley Abandonment Request under consideration. Application MI-24-10 Request for Alley Abandonment: Part of Alley Between S. Governors Avenue and S. Bradford Street (abandonment of an approximately 132 feet length alley segment) will be considered by the Planning Commission on December 16, 2024 and then by City Council in early 2025.

IV. ZONING REVIEW

The entire project site area is located in the H (Historic District Zone) and subject to the provisions of the *Zoning Ordinance*, Article 3 §21 and referenced sections. *Zoning Ordinance*, Article 10 §3.2 outlines the review process for Architectural Review Certification and related building height, bulk, and setback standards.

The subject project area is zoned C-2 (Central Commercial Zone.) The C-2 zone allows for “parking lots and parking structures as a principal use.” The subject property, once combined into one parcel, will have frontage on two streets, South Governors and South Bradford; Minor Street Alley is considered a side. The C-2 zone requires a zero minimum setback. The northern lot line, if treated as a side yard, has no required setback, but a minimum of five feet if provided. Please confirm whether the building placement meets this requirement. From other related project submissions, it appears that this setback ranges from 0.7 feet to 5.2 feet along the northern property lines.

The C-2 zoning district also includes some design standards provisions. See the code excerpt below:

Article 3 Section 13

13.5 *Design standards*. The following standards shall apply to the site and building development in the central commercial zone (C-2):

13.51 *Façade articulation*. Building facades should incorporate design elements to provide a base, middle, and top of the building to reinforce the pedestrian scale at the street level.

13.52 *Height*. For buildings greater than four stories in height, then the upper floors above the fourth story shall step back six feet for fifty percent of the width of the primary façade. For buildings greater than six stories, then the upper floors above the sixth floor shall step back an additional six feet on the primary façade. These step back areas may begin at a lower height than these minimums as part of the building design in order to be compatible with the character of the area.

13.53 *Step back areas*. The step back areas should be open to the sky and can be open air balcony spaces or other design architectural features that are not enclosed spaces.

13.54 *Off-street parking*. Off-street parking lots shall not be permitted to be situated between the street line and the primary facade of the principal building. Consideration should be given to locating parking to the side or rear of the building.

13.55 *Screening*. Any off-street parking lots provided shall be screened from the street line by buildings, landscaping, or other means. Off-street parking lots shall be screened from adjacent residential zones and residential uses. This screening provision does not apply to adjacent alleys.

V. Review of DESIGN STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

The subject project area is located in the Dover Historic District Zone within the Loockerman Context. The Loockerman Context is described on pages 2-7 and 2-8 of the *Design Standards and Guidelines for the City of Dover Historic District Zone*. This *Design Standards and Guidelines* describe this context as “a coherent, densely-built commercial area that would have an attractive mix of historic and new buildings and related parking.” Location within the Dover Historic District Zone requires proposals for demolition, new construction, additions, and certain renovation or rehabilitation activities to existing buildings to receive an Architectural Review Certificate.

As stated in the *Design Standards and Guidelines for the City of Dover Historic District Zone*, an Architectural Review Certificate will be granted “if it is found that the architectural style, general design, height, bulk and setbacks, arrangement location and materials affecting the exterior appearance are generally in harmony with neighboring structures and complementary to the traditional architectural standards of the historic district.” In accordance with Article 10 §3.2, the Historic District Commission will provide a recommendation to the Planning Commission regarding the project’s compliance with the architectural review standards.

This proposal must be reviewed for conformity with the design criteria guidelines found in Chapter 4: New Construction, Additions, Demolition and Relocation. Information on the review considerations is given below.

New Construction

The *Design Standards and Guidelines* for New Construction (Chapter 4: pages 4-1 through 4-8) provide the design criteria and development guidelines. The guidelines specify the following individual considerations for new construction to be considered in the review by the Historic District Commission (and Planning Commission) of the project for Architectural Review Certification:

- Style
- Scale (*building to reflect dominant cornice and roof height of adjacent buildings*)
- Elevation of the First Floor
- Floor-to-Floor heights
- Bays, windows, and doors (*size, relationship, spacing of*)
- Absolute Size (*compare overall size of new building*)
- Massing (*relationship of solid-to-void*)
- Orientation (*location of primary façade*)
- Proportions (*comparison of height to width of building and elements*)
- Materials

- Forms (*shape of building and roof to be complementary*)
- Siting (*location of building on lot and in relation to street*)
- High density/ large-scale construction

The proposed project must also be reviewed for compliance with the standards established by the *Zoning Ordinance*. The standards include items such as setbacks from property lines, lot coverage, height, etc. This Proposal for the new Dover Mobility Center Garage appears to conform to most of the bulk requirements of the C-2 Zoning District, however, dimensions and bulk standards were not included in this submission and should be verified via site plan review. It appears that alternatives for the side yard setback along the north property line will be required. The *City of Dover Zoning Ordinance* authorizes the Historic District Commission to waive certain bulk standards when issuing its recommendation to the Planning Commission for an Architectural Review Certificate if necessary.

VI. STAFF COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are Staff comments and recommendations for this application regarding project activities and Architectural Review Certification.

- 1) Staff recommends conditional approval of the Architectural Review Certificate for the construction of the Dover Mobility Center Garage project finding that the building to be of a compatible design with the nearby buildings and with the intent of the *Design Standards and Guidelines for the City of Dover Historic District Zone*, and with its recommendations for large-scale development in Loockerman Historic Context. The proposed Mobility Center is oriented so that the west and east frontages sit at the sidewalk edge, supporting the pedestrian scale of the Downtown area. The brick exterior finishes on the lower two stories and detailing with building elements and sectioned wall surfaces break-up the expanse of the east and west building elevations and take cues from the architectural styles seen in the Loockerman Street corridor. The street-level presentation along South Governors Avenue and South Bradford Street is building-like in its exterior appearance and design, screening the parking ramp and deck appearances on lower levels while setting them back on the upper levels on the primary elevations.
- 2) Staff recommends approval of alternative side yard setbacks to accommodate the placement of the building in relation to the northern property line(s) given the lot configuration and the likely Building Code and Fire Code related provisions for building construction.
- 3) The following conditions are recommended by Staff to improve the project's compliance with the recommended guidelines of the *Design Standards and Guidelines*. The following are recommended conditions:
 - a. The selected brick choices should be compatible to the brick of other existing buildings in the area.
 - b. Consideration of wall or free-standing signage may require additional review.
 - c. Any light fixtures utilized on the property should be consistent with the style of the lighting used in the nearby areas of the Historic District.

- d. Ensure proposed trees are appropriate to urban planting settings along streets. Any trees planted within the street right-of-way must be approved by the City of Dover.
 - e. The south elevation should include treatment to improve the appearance at the roof level, particularly at the southwest corner, as this building will be taller than the adjacent buildings on Loockerman Street and will therefore be visible.
 - f. The north elevation is a large expanse of blank wall (western portion). While this may be a prime location for public art, architectural features that break up the large solid wall should also be considered.
 - g. On the north elevation for the eastern half where the parking garage concrete construction will be exposed with large openings, consideration should be given to greater detailing as this no longer appears to be a “party wall.” At the pedestrian level the continuation of brick materials is recommended and other segmentation or detailing to divide this wall and give dimension.
 - h. Clarify the treatment of the large openings in the brick facades at the second-floor level, especially on the S. Bradford Street elevation.
 - i. Any revisions or changes in the identified materials may be subject to further review by the Historic District Commission.
- 4) The Mobility Center Garage appears to comply with the design standards of the C-2 zoning district in regard to the building façade articulation (having a base, middle and top); the step backs for the upper floors and their format. The actual dimensions will need to be confirmed in the Site Plan submission.
- a. To improve compliance with these design standards the applicant is encouraged to look at how they are defining the top of the building, especially in the stair towers and top level of the parking garage concrete terminations.
- 5) Some of the site improvements/amenities were not specifically described or had limited information within the application information. Please provide information for consideration and discussion.
- a. The proposed plan identifies an area on the street level for bicycle and scooter parking. Based on 400 parking spaces (rate of one [1] bicycle space per 20 vehicle spaces), the property will be required to provide a minimum of 20 bicycle parking spaces.
 - b. The design of the sidewalks along South Governors Avenue and South Bradford Street frontages must be evaluated with sidewalk construction standards and streetscape designs for each street. Given the volume of pedestrian traffic anticipated in the area, a minimum of a five-foot-wide sidewalk is necessary.
- 6) The following items should be clarified regarding the building designs.
- a. Identify brick material (size, form, etc.) and patterning.
 - b. Clarify format of the long band openings on the southeast and north side of the Parking Garage Structure.

- 7) Staff notes that the project location (building and site) may be an opportunity for the incorporation of public art projects, including but not limited to the proposed mural on the north facing wall.
- 8) Staff recommends the following pertaining to the site design elements of the project:
 - a. The sidewalk system on the street frontage should continue and include barrier free access, crosswalk striping, etc. at the points of intersection with the entrance and exit drive aisles.
 - b. Any proposed landscaping or tree planting locations, and lighting fixture locations should be depicted on the plan and be consistent with the character of these elements as they exist within the Loockerman context area.
- 9) For building construction, the requirements of the building code or fire code must be complied with. Consult with the Building Inspections Staff and Fire Marshal regarding these requirements. The resolution of these items can impact the site design in some cases.
- 10) In the event that major changes and revisions to the design, materials, or site layout occur in the finalization of the plan and/or construction drawings contact the Department of Planning and Inspections. These changes may require resubmittal for review by the Historic District Commission.
- 11) This site development plan for this project is also subject to the application and review process for Site Development Plan (Article 10 §2 of the *Zoning Ordinance*) before the Planning Commission. Note: Additional technical items for compliance with the *Zoning Ordinance* and other regulations may be identified during the Site Plan Process. Review comments pertaining specifically to the Site Plan set will be issued at that time.
- 12) The applicant shall be aware that Building Permits are required to proceed with any construction activities on the project site. The permit applications must comply with the approvals and conditions granted through the Architectural Review Certification and Site Plan Review process.
- 13) The applicant should be aware that a Sign Permit is required to proceed with the placement of signage on the property.

VII. Historic District Commission Action Required

The Historic District Commission shall consider the proposal and provide a recommendation in regard to the Architectural Review Certification for the Dover Mobility Center Parking Garage Structure and associated Site Improvements. The recommendation should reflect consideration of the *Design Standards and Guidelines for the City of Dover Historic District Zone*.