

Good Morning. Thank you Chairman Jordan and members of the Board for hearing our request.

The Universalist National Memorial Church completed construction and occupied our current church building in 1930. At that time the Universalists were a separate denomination and this building was considered its National Church, with a robust congregation. In XXX the Universalist denomination merged with the Unitarians to become the Unitarian Universalist Association. The building is a contributing structure to the "16th Street Historical District."

I have been a member of the church for nearly 30 years, since 1983. I have served ten years, under two separate terms, as the Church Moderator, or Chair of the Board of Trustees, and currently serve as the Chair of the Building and Grounds Committee.

When I arrived at the Church it had an active congregation of approximately 90 active members. Attendance would range around 60 parishioners. Today the congregation has dwindled to around 40 active members and our Sunday attendance ranges from 25 to 35 people. This decline has resulted in significant financial strain on the Church.

For example last year, due to budgetary concerns, we decided to become a "lay-led" church where members of the Congregation would assume ministerial and liturgical duties. In October we did hire a part-time temporary and retired minister, but remain essentially lay-led.

We face many challenges including a large Church structure, beautiful in its internal and external architecture, but extremely expensive to maintain. Due to the recent earthquake, we had extensive damage to the Church Tower, which required us to make over \$100,000 of repairs.

In addition, the Church building is in desperate need of restoration and other critical repairs, especially replacement of its capstones. A few years ago we had Waters Craftsman prepare a needs assessment which we have included in our submission. The repairs needed approximate \$1 million. Our annual operational budget is well under \$200,000.

DEC 11

BOARD OF ZONING ADJUSTMENT
District of Columbia

CASE NO. 18471 Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
EXHIBIT NO. 43 CASE NO. 18471
EXHIBIT NO. 43

The combination of our declining and small membership and the need to restore and repair our historic Church building has left the Church in a precarious position to say the least.

Perkins Hall, our basement, is a large 7,400 square foot room with a capacity of 225 persons. It actually, at one end, has a stage and in its day was used for congregational meetings and events. Perkins Hall by any measure is a significantly “underutilized” space. It is used infrequently for congregational purposes, and, but for the Spooky Action Theatre’s performances, stands empty and idle most of the time.

At one point, about ten years ago, the Church looked at the feasibility of “day care” use for the basement, but the needed changes to bath room facilities, and other physical requirements made this use totally unrealistic. We could not find any suitable permitted non-church uses for this space.

Spooky Action’s performances in the Church basement bring desperately needed revenue to the Church that is critical to helping us restore and repair the building. We believe this restoration is beneficial to the neighborhood by improving the neighborhood’s aesthetics and safety. We also believe that the use of underutilized space, as in this case, contributes to the city’s commitment to sustainable development.

While it may not be a determining issue for this hearing, we do believe that the theatre’s artistic expression adds to the cultural and artistic life of the city and the neighborhood, values we, as a Church community of faith, strongly support.

In this spirit, the Church wants to be a good neighbor and be respectful of the residents in the surrounding area. Working with the ANC2B, and some of the neighbors, we have agreed to several restrictions that we have listed in our formal statement, including requirements that the theatre use the alley entrance only for service functions and that all audience attendees, staff and actors use the front 16th Street entrance of the Church. We were able to do this for the last Spooky Action Theatre performance in October and we do not believe the

neighborhood was negatively impacted. We want to emphasize that the Church will restrict the theatre to approximately 48 performances annually.

With these requirements and restrictions in place, we believe that we will not be a noise or nuisance in any way to the neighborhood. Quite the opposite, we want to be seen as an integral part of the life of the community. We believe our use of Perkins Hall for performances by outside theaters is consistent with this objective and protective the neighborhood. We ask that you seriously consider our request.

Thank you.