

**Statement in Support of the Application by the Andrew Keegan Theatre Company for a
Variance Use Provision to Allow a Theatre Performance Space BZA No 18722**

For more than 30 years a number of professional theatre companies have been in residence at 1742 Church Street NW providing entertaining and thought-provoking theatre performances for the Washington DC and wider Metropolitan area theatre going public. Now the Andrew Keegan Theatre Company has purchased that building and is planning to renovate the run-down building, modernizing it to make it handicapped accessible and assuring that the design is compatible with the neighborhood location. The renovation will maintain the same number of theatre seats that have been in the theatre historically. As a result, once the renovation is complete, Church Street will not experience an increase in foot or automobile traffic above that it currently experiences due to performances in the theatre.

I understand that without your approval of a variance to the theatre's current use provision to allow its use as a theatre performance space, the Keegan Theatre will not be able to function, put on its Helen Hayes noted and awarded productions or survive in its current location. What a terrible loss that would be to the Dupont Circle area, the Washington Theatre community and to those of us who are drawn into Washington DC from Virginia to see the high quality and affordable productions mounted in the intimate space at the Keegan Theatre.

For almost 20 years, my husband and I have been intrigued by and loyal to the Keegan Theatre family because they produce plays that speak to the human heart and the human condition with genuine artistry. Ever since the Keegan Theatre returned to the Church Street location, hoping to make its permanent home there, my husband and I have been season ticket holders. Often we bring friends and family from Virginia to the shows, parking at a local parking garage and dining beforehand in one of the many local restaurants near the theatre. Clearly the Keegan Theatre is enhancing the local Dupont Circle economy in ways that extend beyond ticket sales.

Another reason for approving the variance is that Washington DC will be welcoming a theatre company that fully engages with the local community in ways that extend beyond their own theatre productions and which have a great impact on young people in particular. Although the Keegan Theatre's first production was in the Church Street Theatre, the theatre group originally made its home in the basement of a church in Arlington. Even though the company was just starting out, it made a commitment to work with that church and others in the Arlington community to introduce young people to the magic of theatre performance and production.

I first became aware of the theatre when its artistic director, Mark Rhea, partnered with my own church to create the Chalice Theatre program, an intergenerational performance group involving adults, children and teenagers in all aspects of theatre production, including acting, singing, making props, painting sets, working in the backstage crew. Since Chalice Theatre's first collaboration with the Keegan Theatre family, Mark Rhea has directed many of our most

**BOARD OF ZONING ADJUSTMENT
District of Columbia**

CASE NO.

18722

EXHIBIT NO.

49

2018 MAY -2 AM 9:26
RECEIVED
OFFICE OF THE
CLERK OF THE
BOARD OF ZONING ADJUSTMENT
Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.18722
EXHIBIT NO.49

successful productions encouraging the maturing skills of the young actors and even finding opportunities for some of the more talented and committed children and teens to perform in professional Keegan Theatre productions. Some of the young people nurtured by Mark and the Keegan family of performers and other professionals have pursued theatre studies in college.

But the Keegan Theatre's involvement with Chalice Theatre has not just involved teaching children, teens and adults how to act but how to collaborate in large musical productions. Opportunities have been provided for teens and adults to work together behind the stage operating lights, moving scenery, taking care of props, designing character make-up and making sets. The children and teens have learned that a successful production needs dedicated and skilled people behind the scenes as much as it needs talented people in the spotlight. In addition, through Keegan Theatre professionals and their connections, Chalice Theatre has had help and training with set and lighting design, choreography and other production requirements.

As a member of the Chalice Theatre Committee at my church for many years, a Keegan Theatre Board member for 6 years (retiring in 2012) and a delighted performer in many Chalice Theatre shows, I witnessed the commitment the Keegan Theatre family has made to engaging with the local community, working with organizations committed to educational theatrical opportunities for children, teens and adults, and improving its capacity to do more. As a result of those efforts, children, teens and adults have been engaged in the creative process together, building relationships across families and generations and maintaining those friendships over many years.

One reason for going forward with the acquisition and renovation of the Church Street Theatre was to bring new life to a run-down building and to create rehearsal space and adequate bathroom facilities that would support the Keegan Theatre's own productions and enhance its ability for greater involvement in the local community. By fulfilling their renovation plans, there will be space for community meetings, drama classes, engagement with organizations that want to build their own amateur theatre programs - the possibilities are exciting. Given the creative energy and vision of the artistic directors, Mark and Susan Rhea, the support of the active Keegan Theatre board and talented staff, I am certain The Andrew Keegan Theatre's future on Church Street will be a great asset to the Dupont Circle community.

I urge you to approve the application for a variance to the use provision to allow the Keegan Theatre, following in the footsteps of many theatre companies before them at that location, to create theatre performances in the charming theatre on Church Street.

Diane E. Donus

May 1, 2014

Diane E. Donus
4610 6th Street South
Arlington, VA 22204