BOARD OF ZONING ADJUSTMENT
In re: Application No. 16400
Hearing Date: December 2, 1998

STATEMENT OF APPLICANT IN SUPPORT
OF APPLICATION

Mr. Joseph A. Semper, applicant in Application Number 16400, hereby submits this statement in support of the application for a public hall license at 1350 Okie Street, N.E., square 4038, lot 142/103.

BACKGROUND

The premises at 1350 Okie Street, N.E. house the National Association of Concerned Veterans' ("NACV") programs for delivery of services to veterans. In order to obtain additional income to maximize service delivery to its clients, and to optimize efficient use of its space, the NACV has entered into a lease agreement with Mr. Semper to use the first floor of that address as a "night club."

Mr. Semper currently possesses a certificate of occupancy to use the space as a private club, and has staged a number of events there without incident. However, because of the difficulty in obtaining all the licenses necessary to facilitate success of the events, some of the events have had to be canceled. This has created understandable reluctance on the part of Mr. Semper's target audience (mature, responsible adults age 25 and older) to count on an event at 1350 Okie Street coming off as planned. Therefore, application was made for a public hall license so that Mr. Semper's business can sustain itself and grow, providing neighborhood growth, economic development, potential jobs for neighborhood residents, and an increase in the city's tax base. This would come only at the expense of the outlaws currently using the neighborhood to dump food and trash, soliciting for lewd and improper purposes, vandalizing the buildings, and

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stripping cars.

CURRENT CONDITIONS ARE PROMOTING CRIME

Current conditions around the vicinity of 1350 Okie Street create an environment in which crime can flourish. There is prostitution taking place, buildings are being vandalized and pipe and other fittings stolen, cars and boats are being stripped on the street and in the alleys, old tires are being dumped, and old unsold vegetables and other food are dumped there constantly.

The unoccupied buildings in the area are also prime targets for thieves who have cannibalized the buildings, stripping copper piping, toilet fittings, and electrical wire, among other things. These thefts occur repeatedly, not in isolation. Mr. Semper and the NACV have been the victims of such break ins numerous times, incurring great financial hardship in their efforts to do business in that neighborhood.

Mr. Semper has been at the forefront in combating these conditions, by contacting the Department of Public Works and other relevant agencies, and taking corrective measures on his own such as repairing damage, picking up trash, and other tasks. His efforts in this regard would continue and intensify if the requested license is granted.

THE REQUESTED LICENSE WOULD BENEFIT THE NEIGHBORHOOD

The requested license would benefit the community by providing activity in the neighborhood, which experienced police officers acknowledge is a deterrent to crime. In fact, Officer Thomas Stevenson, a 14-year veteran of the Metropolitan Police Department, including 10 years as a vice officer, is currently assigned to vice duty in PSA 507, the relevant Patrol Service Area. He has told Mr. Semper that he supports an venture that brings activity to the area in the evening hours, when he has observed illegal activity at its highest. (Officer Stevenson is

expected to file a statement supporting an entity, such as a public hall, that would bring activity to the neighborhood in the evening hours, when his extensive experience tells him that crime is at its peak.)

Mr. Semper, who is not new to the neighborhood, has been attempting to develop an viable economic concern there for many years. The current private club license is a step in the right direction, but it does not allow him to stage events with the predictability and level of publicity that consistent success for such events requires. A public hall license would allow him to sell tickets at the door and advertise more effectively, ensuring a greater chance of success on those events. The events he has held there in the past year have generated absolutely no complaints nor problems. He has employed off duty MPD officers as well as private security guards to keep order and decorum at his events. The presence of the MPD officers ensures that laws will be enforced and obstreperous behavior prevented. Thus, there should be no concern for the safety of the neighborhood residents, since history and experience shows that Mr. Semper can organize the affairs of the business in such a manner that the public safety is upheld.

Parking should not be a problem in that area for two reasons: first, other than the scofflaws, there is very little activity in the area in the evening. Second, there are no homes nearby, so patrons will not displace residents searching for parking space. Further, the certificate of occupancy limits the occupancy load to 300, thus limiting the number of cars seeking to park.

Granting the requested license would enable a local small business to exist on a viable basis, giving it a means to engage in lawful activities that allow it to grow and develop. As the community develops and flourishes, so does the city. Generation of additional revenues and taxable activities means a speedier end to the city's financial crisis, and presumable a quicker

return of control of the city to its residents. The opposition filed by four ANC commissioners (which was not the result of a properly held ANC meeting and is therefore invalid as purporting to represent the views of the ANC) rather arrogantly states that "Ivy City residents do not need private clubs to provide opportunities for outsiders to have a negative impact on their neighborhoods." Without addressing the rather obvious point that four ANC commissioners do not constitute the voice of all Ivy City residents, that statement does not reflect a calm, objective view of the benefits this business would provide the community. Indeed, it assumes, without a factual basis advanced for that conclusion, that the business would have a negative impact. That is simply not true. In addition to the benefits described above, we intend to hire neighborhood residents, where possible, as employees.

CONCLUSION

The requested license would benefit the community in the ways described herein. Officer Stevenson, who is responsible for vice duty in that PSA, has confirmed that it would help to alleviate or displace current illegal activity in the neighborhood. If this license is not granted, it is likely that the NACV will have to abandon the building as the costs of continued occupancy under current conditions makes it economically unfeasible to go on. We respectfully request grant of the application.

Respectfully submitted,

Joseph A. Semper