

Testimony of Anwar Saleem Cluck U Chicken. Board of Zoning

Tuesday, April 4, 2006 1:00 p.m.

Good afternoon,

My name is Anwar Saleem. I grew up a few blocks from the H Street corridor, opened and own a business there, have trained employees to go into business for themselves, I chair the Merchants Association and H Street Main Street and led the fight to fund a strategic development plan for the H Street Corridor at a time when many had given up hope.

First and foremost, I would like to thank the owner of Cluck U Chicken, a young man who grew up in the neighborhood who had the heart and wisdom to step up and offer an economic incentive to a corridor desperately struggling to claim a new identity.

This young man came to H Street with a vision and creativity. One that would totally renovate a long standing vacant building and transformed it into an economic catalyst that now employees many neighbors who now are able to receive entry level work experience and further creating a tax base that is so desperately needed.

This creative young man took a business model and was able to transform it to fit the current rules of DCRA and provide a need to the community by offering affordable set in dinning to those who otherwise would not be able to afford the experience. This model is no different than a Boston Market, Au Bon Pain or Ben's Chili Bowl who meets this requirement under the same conditions.

This business might not fit the desires of some of the elitist that are moving into the neighborhood, but it does serve as the new neighborhood bistro for those who have lighter pockets or have the taste for a light southern cuisine. Just because he changed his model to fit the rules, does not mean the bar should be moved higher to disqualify him from operating or to send him through unnecessary loops to do business.

We have observed that 80% of the food is made to order, with many eating from washable dishware. Many residents and employees of various businesses along the corridor including employees from DPW, MPD, the Department of Employment Services, have enjoyed the restaurant experience... The out side appearance of the building is much cleaner than it's ever been and it has restored a sense of pride to many.

BOARD OF ZONING ADJUSTMENT
District of Columbia

CASE NO. 17439

EXHIBIT NO. 37

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We feel that this businessman has complied with the present rules and regulations to operate a restaurant at this location. He should not have to go through a special exception process when he qualifies under the present rule...

With this application, the perception is that many businessmen and residents feel that businessmen along the corridor are being harassed and discouraged. I am out here daily, visiting other locations, making phone calls and meeting with many people to encourage them to locate on the corridor. Some are concerned about this issue and have been discouraged, while others wait to see what is going to happen.

In reality, we have attracted over 44 new businesses to the corridor within the last few years and that has not been an easy process in itself. H Street is going through a painful transformation. I would rather have this fight today than to deal with what H Street was 5 years ago with blocks of vacant buildings with no hope of change. The pains of growth are real. This is a class issue of the haves versus those who don't have as much. But during this growth period, we are beginning to see incremental progress and this is the beginning of positive changes.

Let the community through patronage of the businesses dictate if a business is going to survive. Not redefining the present rules to send this business through additional financial hardship at the 11 hour.

I strongly encourage the board to deny this request, forcing this business to go another undue process. Allow him to now practice his unalienable rights, one of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness under the Constitutions of these United States

Anwar Saleem