

March 27, 2024

Dear Zoning Board,

On behalf of **Empower DC**, I am submitting this testimony to express our support for Chinatown businesses and residents, regarding BZA Case 20974 (507-517 H Street NW). My organization believes that District residents directly affected by development need to have a voice on what happens in their neighborhood and community. In this case, a stronghold of long-time Chinatown residents are lifting up their concern about the impact of this development and the need to retain much used small businesses they depend on. For years now, we have seen the displacement of business and residents from Chinatown, moving forward with the developers plans, will only exacerbate this loss.

Chinatown is an essential part of the fabric of our city. With less than 300 Chinese Americans and fewer than a dozen Chinese American small businesses remaining, it is the very existence of Chinatown that is at stake. The proposed displacement of retail space on this block would accelerate the erasure of the Chinese American community, and with it, Chinatown's unique character, history, and economy. Chinatown's long term Chinese businesses are core to the appeal of the neighborhood; they offer an authentic sense of place, cultural exchange, and connection to history that is invaluable to our city.

The proposed retail reduction will impose deep loss onto the long-term Chinese American residents that serve as the backbone of Chinatown. Residents who work at the businesses will lose their livelihoods. Residents will lose access to goods, services, and important community spaces that are central to their cultural identity, happiness and sense of belonging.

The developer cites that they have consulted with Chinatown institutions such as 1882 Foundation, and that the building owner himself has a long history with the Chinatown community. We want to emphasize that while this may be true, these parties do not live in Chinatown. They do not and cannot represent the needs of those who live and work here, and are most directly impacted by the ongoing changes in the neighborhood.

The DCMR states, the objective of the Chinatown Sub-Area are to protect and enhance downtown's only ethnic cultural area by **maintaining and expanding** the existing concentration of retail uses emphasizing Chinese or Asian cultural and community facilities. Further, DC's Comprehensive Plan (see: Chapter 7 and Policy CW-2.3) states that Chinatown is to be protected so that its cultural traditions and people can remain as this important area of Downtown.

This request for relief should not be granted as it directly contradicts city planning policies that seek to protect Chinatown and its people. If granted, this exception will deal a permanent, deeply harmful blow to this already struggling community. We support the Wah Luck House Tenants Association's asks for the developer to support small business preservation, and the establishment of an Asian grocery store in Chinatown.

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Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.20974
EXHIBIT NO.101