

# TSUNAMI HAIR STUDIO DC

## BZA PRESENTATION

<b>BZA No.</b>	21287
<b>APPLICANT:</b>	LATOYA LILES-WALKER, OWNER, 4248 BENNING RD LLC CEO, TSUNAMI HAIR STUDIO DC
<b>ARCHITECT:</b>	JOHN ODUROE, AIA BIG TENT DESIGN STUDIO
<b>DATE:</b>	MAY 21, 2025

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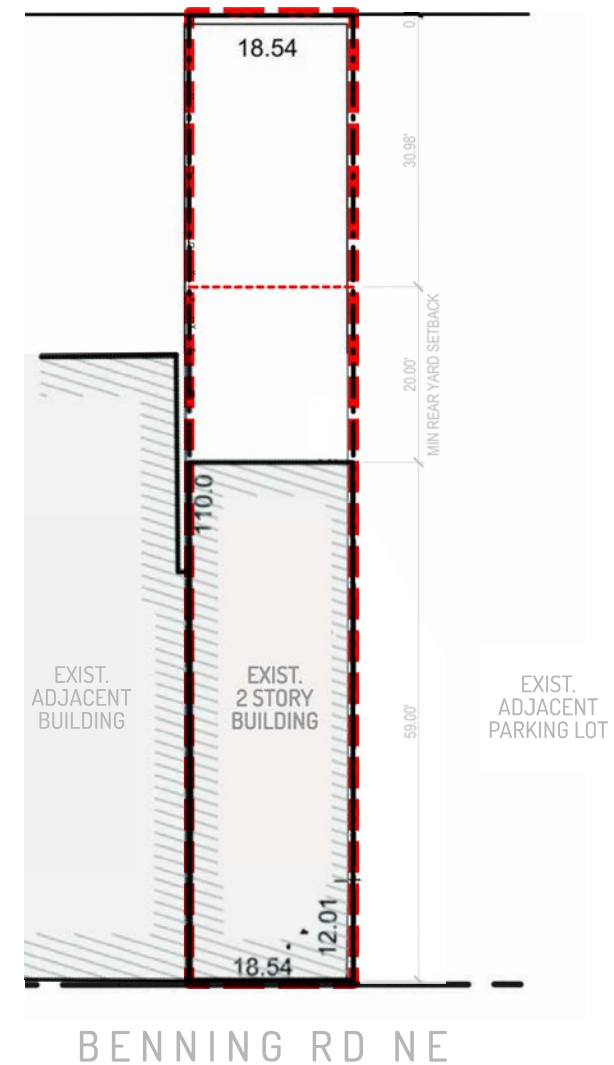
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# PROJECT OVERVIEW

<b>ADDRESS</b>	4248 Benning Road NE Washington, DC 20019
	<b>Square 5087, Lot 0856</b>
<b>LOT AREA</b>	2039 SF
<b>ZONE</b>	RA-1
<b>EXISTING USE</b>	
	Commercial use as a beauty salon (non-conforming) use originally authorized under <b>BZA Order No. 8021</b> (1964)



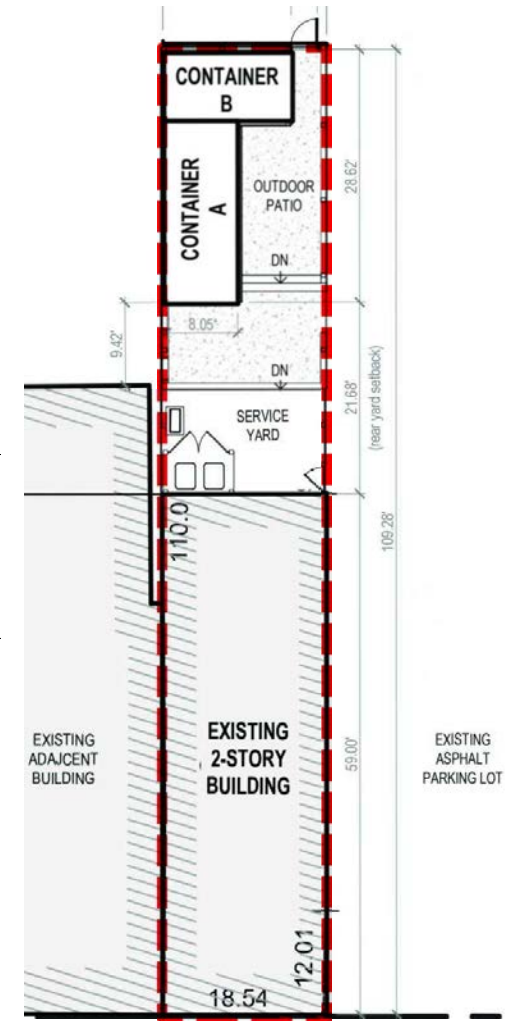
## PROPOSED WORK

Tsunami Hair Studio is a long-standing neighborhood salon. **The applicant proposes installing (2) conditioned prefabricated shipping containers in the rear yard to store equipment, materials, and supplies.**

By relocating storage outside the main building, the project will free up interior space needed to maintain safe, compliant salon operations.

## RELIEF REQUESTED

- 1. Use Variance** (U-401.1 & X-1000.1) – To allow storage units to be installed in support of the existing nonconforming use in the RA-1 zone
- 2. Area Variance – FAR** (F-201.1 & X-1000.1) – 0.9 permitted, 1.12 proposed
- 3. Area Variance – LOT OCCUPANCY** (F-210.1 & X-1000.1):  
40% permitted, 72% proposed



# LEGAL FRAMEWORK: the variance tests

## LEGAL FRAMEWORK – USE & AREA VARIANCE TESTS STANDARDS

TEST	AREA VARIANCE	USE VARIANCE
<b>1. EXCEPTIONAL CONDITION OF THE PROPERTY</b>	Property must face a unique physical or legal condition that creates a zoning burden.	Property must face a unique physical or legal condition that creates a zoning burden.
<b>2. BURDEN ON THE PROPERTY OWNER</b>	Applicant must show that strict zoning compliance would result in practical difficulty due to the exceptional condition.	Applicant must show that zoning restrictions impose an undue hardship due to the exceptional condition.  <i>Note: Proving undue hardship (use variance) satisfies the lower standard of practical difficulty (area variance)</i>
<b>3. NO HARM TO PUBLIC GOOD OR THE ZONING ORDINANCE</b>	Relief must not cause substantial harm to the public good or impair the intent of the zoning regulations.	Relief must not cause substantial harm to the public good or impair the intent of the zoning regulations.

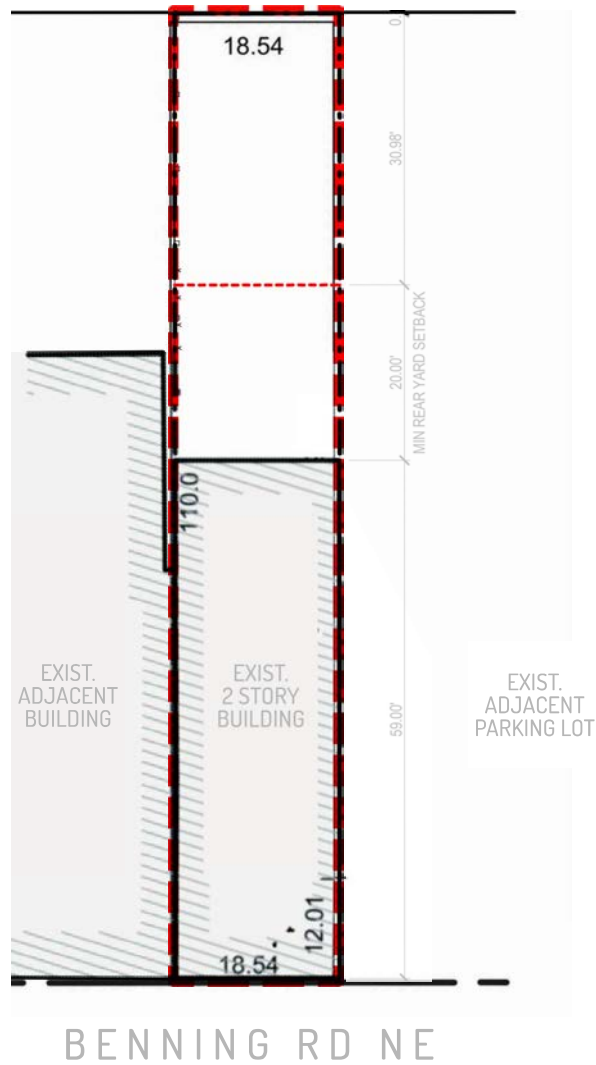
*See D.C. Zoning Regulations, Subtitle X § 1000.1 (statutory authority) and § 1002.1 (review standards for use and area variances)*

# TEST 1:

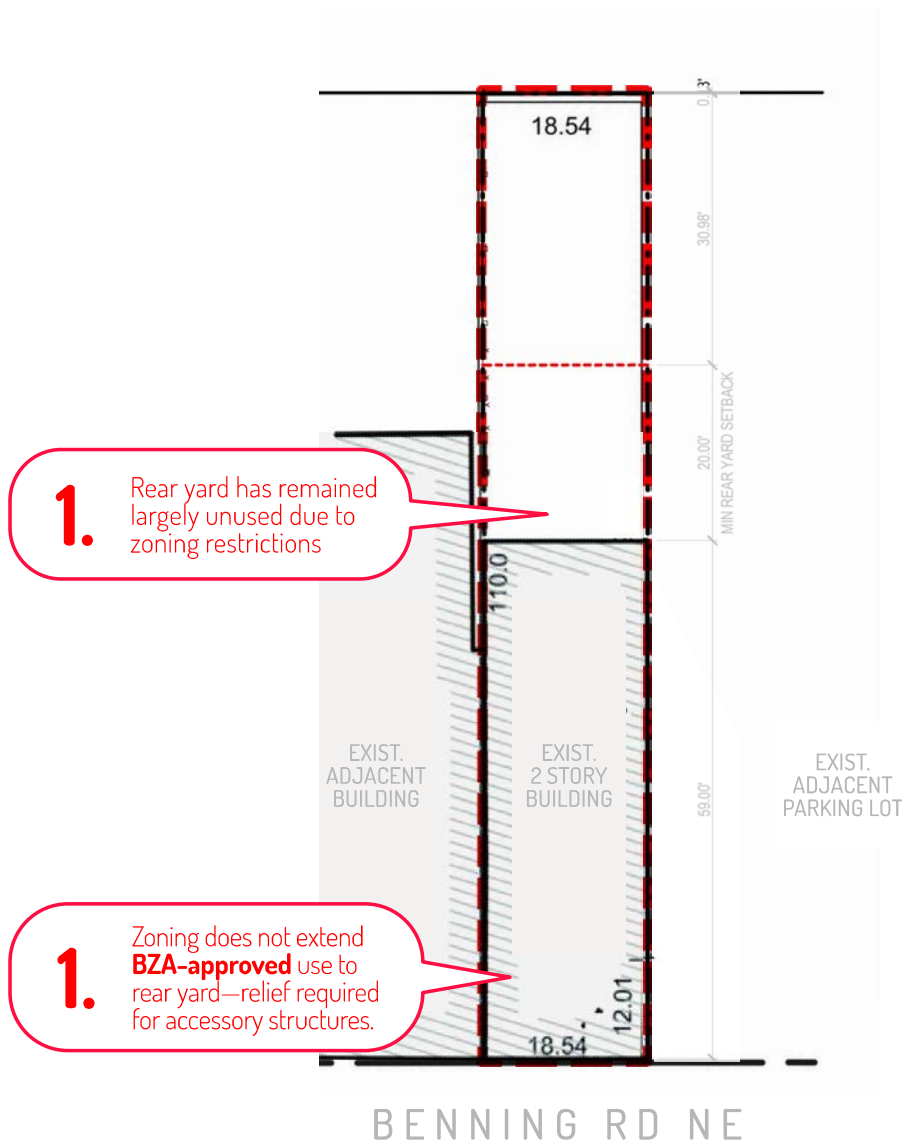
exceptional condition of the property



## CONFLUENCE OF EXCEPTIONAL CONDITIONS INHERENT TO THE PROPERTY

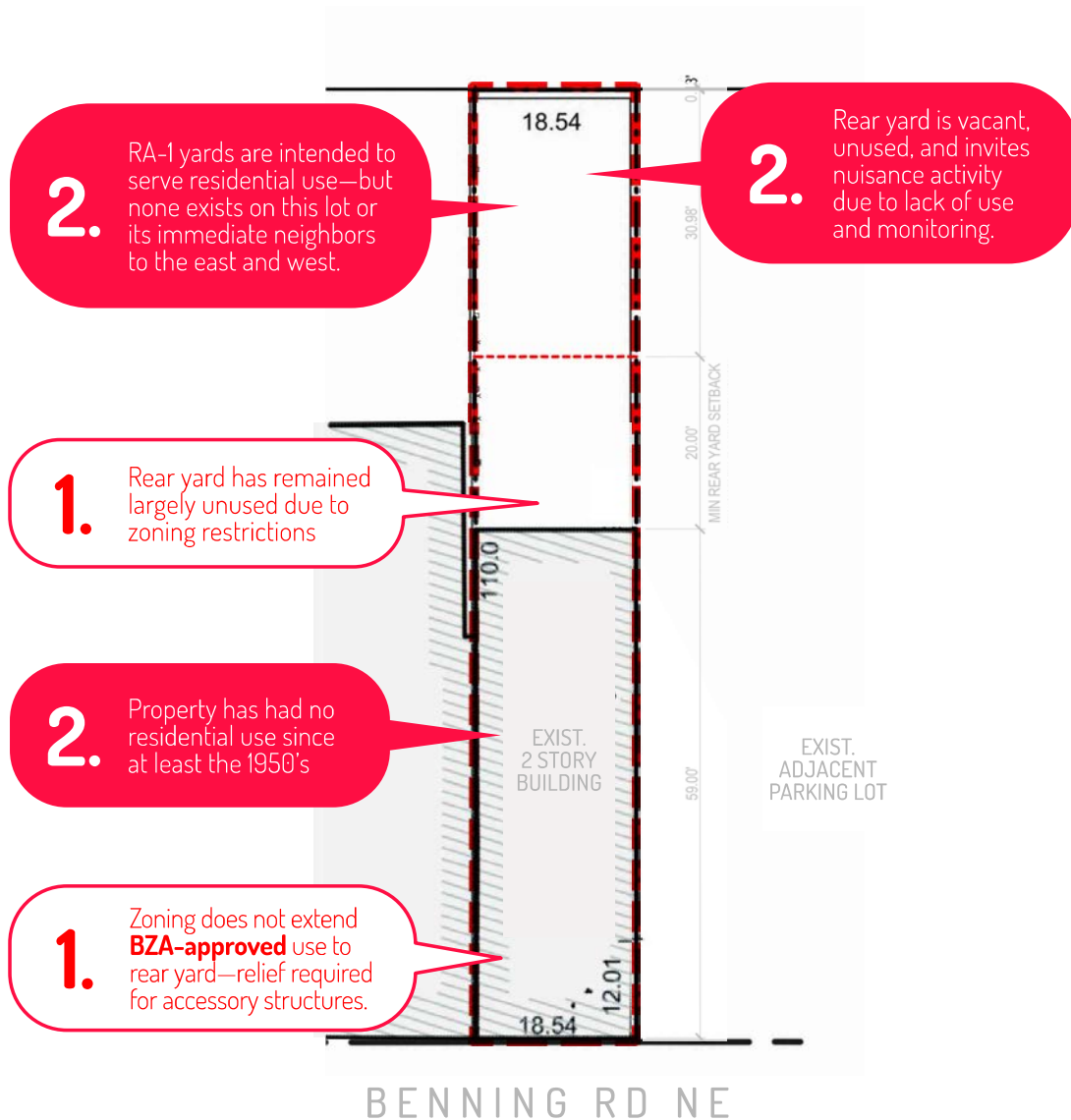


## CONFLUENCE OF EXCEPTIONAL CONDITIONS INHERENT TO THE PROPERTY



### 1. Zoning Mismatch & Nonconforming Use Limitations —

The building has a lawful commercial use, but the rear yard remains subject to RA-1 zoning—blocking even modest improvements to support the use. Zoning regulations don't automatically extend nonconforming use rights to the full lot, so relief is required for accessory structures.



## CONFLUENCE OF EXCEPTIONAL CONDITIONS INHERENT TO THE PROPERTY

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The building has a lawful commercial use, but the rear yard remains subject to RA-1 zoning—blocking even modest improvements to support the use. Zoning regulations don't automatically extend nonconforming use rights to the full lot, so relief is required for accessory structures.
- 2. Rear Yard No Longer Serves Its Zoning Purpose —** RA-1 zoning requires rear yards to serve residential occupants—but this site hasn't had a residential function in over 60 years. With no residents to serve and no legal path to repurpose it, the yard's intended zoning function is obsolete.

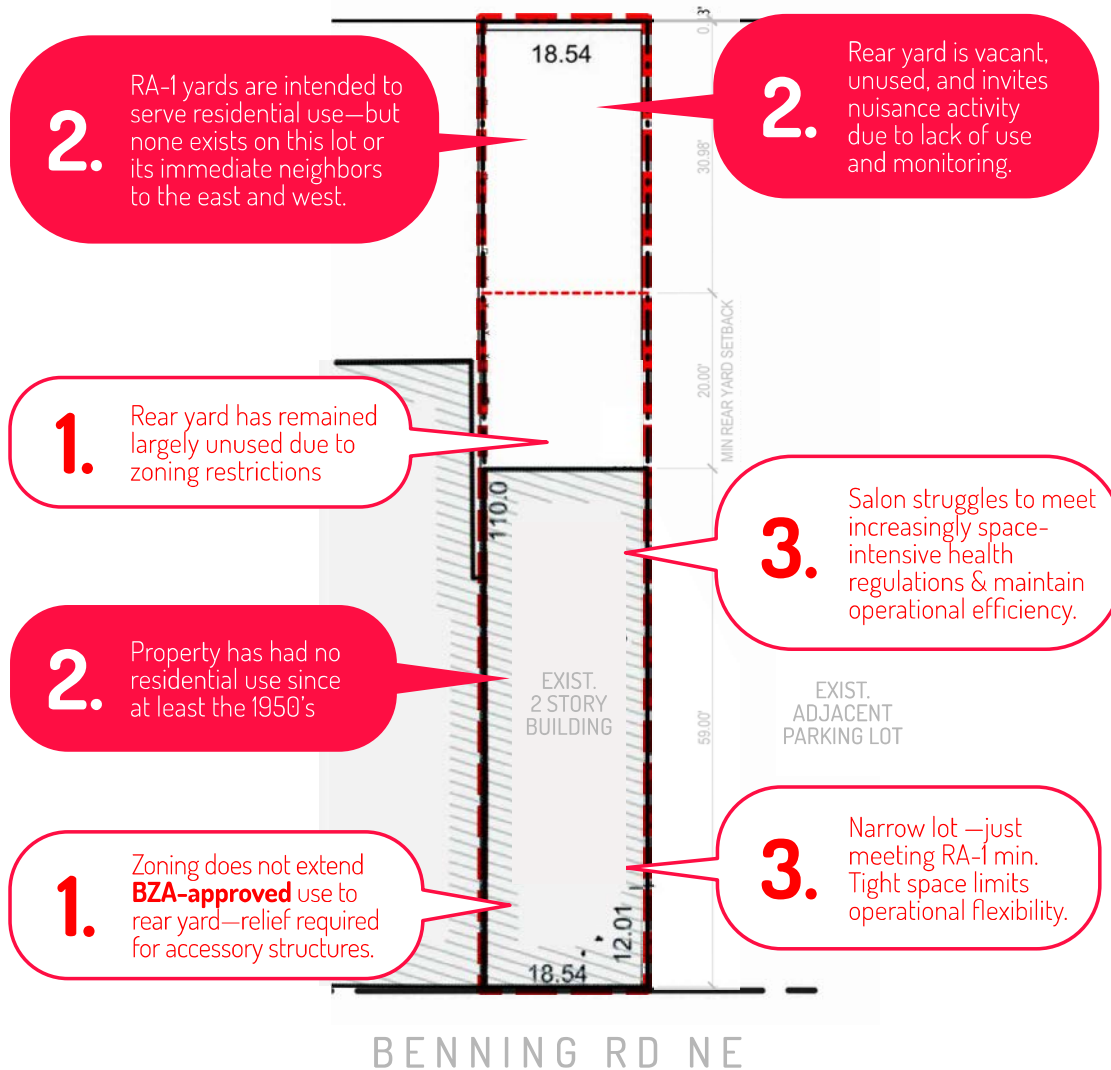


Existing rear yard looking East.



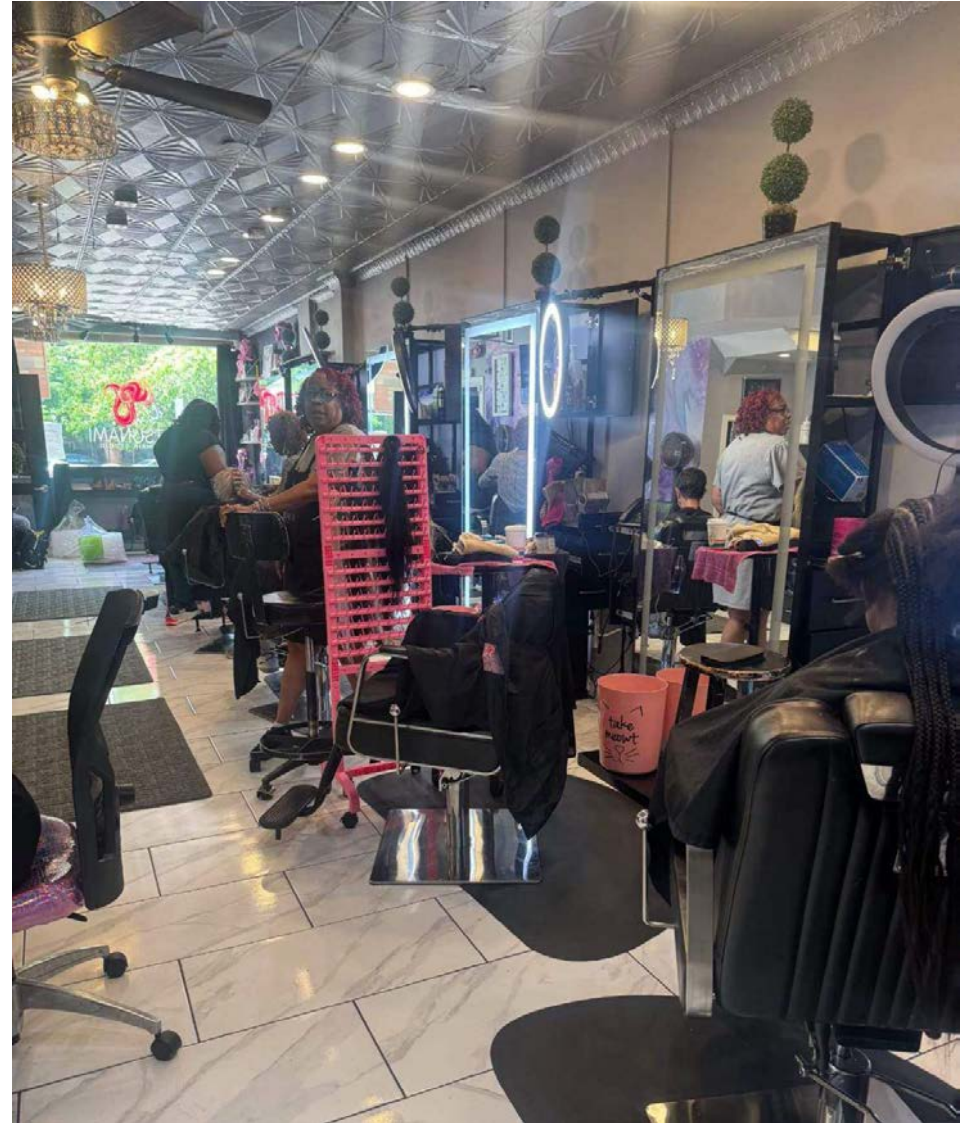
Existing rear yard looking North





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- 3. Small, Narrow, Fully Built-Out Lot —** At just 2,040 SF and 18.5 feet wide, the lot offers no interior space to meet modern health and safety requirements. Zoning prohibits improvements to the rear yard that could support the building's lawful use.

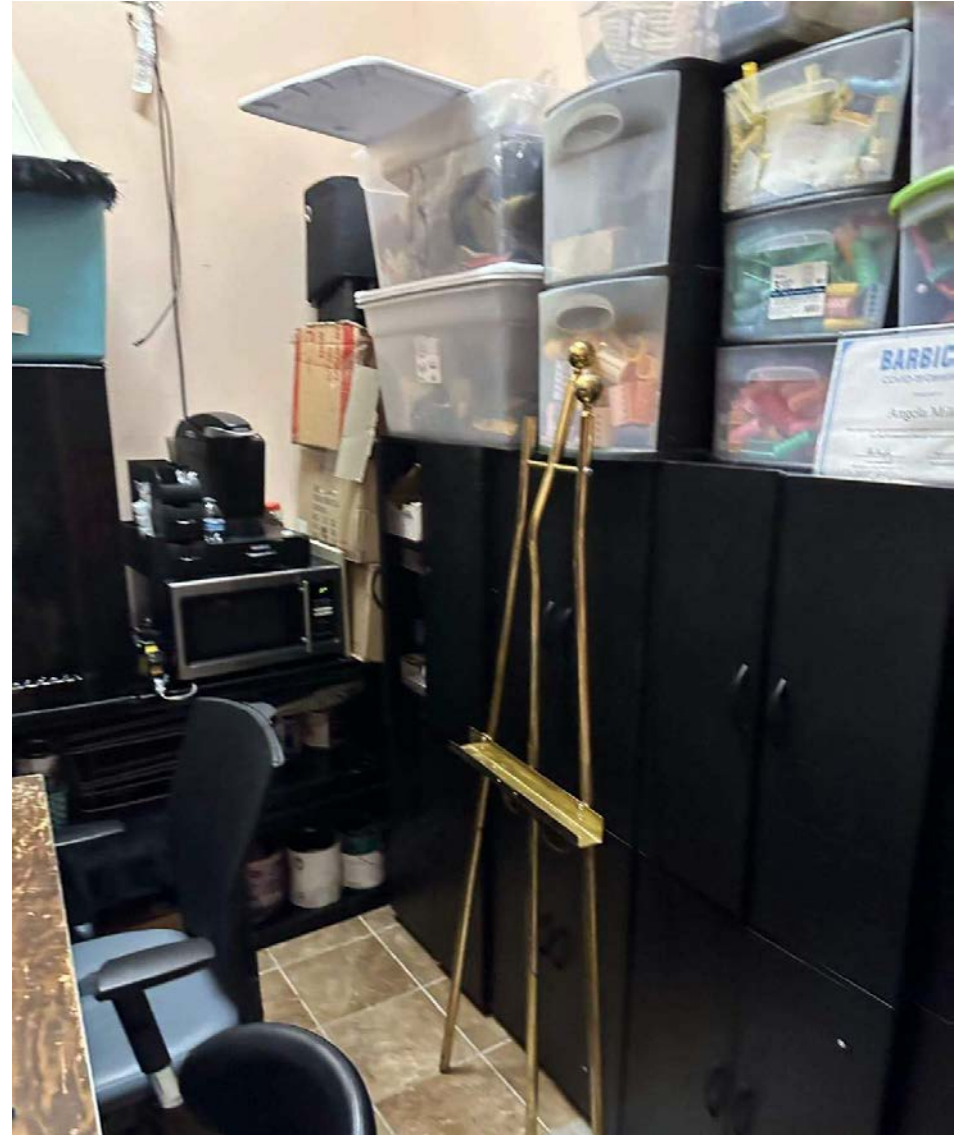








**BIG TENT DESIGN STUDIO**



**TEST 1 - EXCEPTIONAL CONDITION OF THE PROPERTY - LIMITED LOT SIZE 16**





BIG TENT DESIGN STUDIO



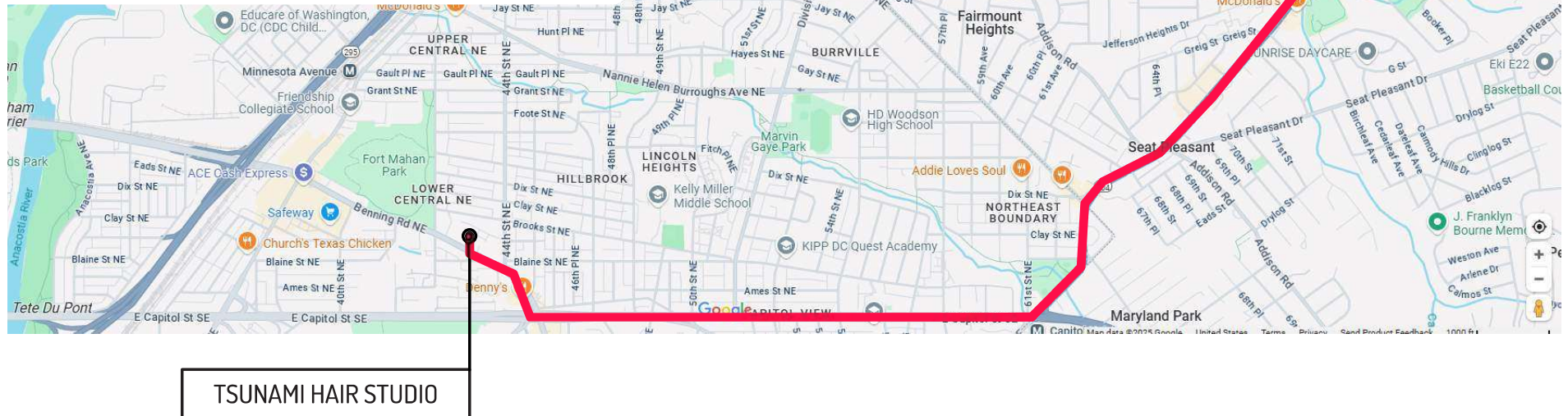
TEST 1 - EXCEPTIONAL CONDITION OF THE PROPERTY - LIMITED LOT SIZE 17

## OFF-SITE STORAGE ?

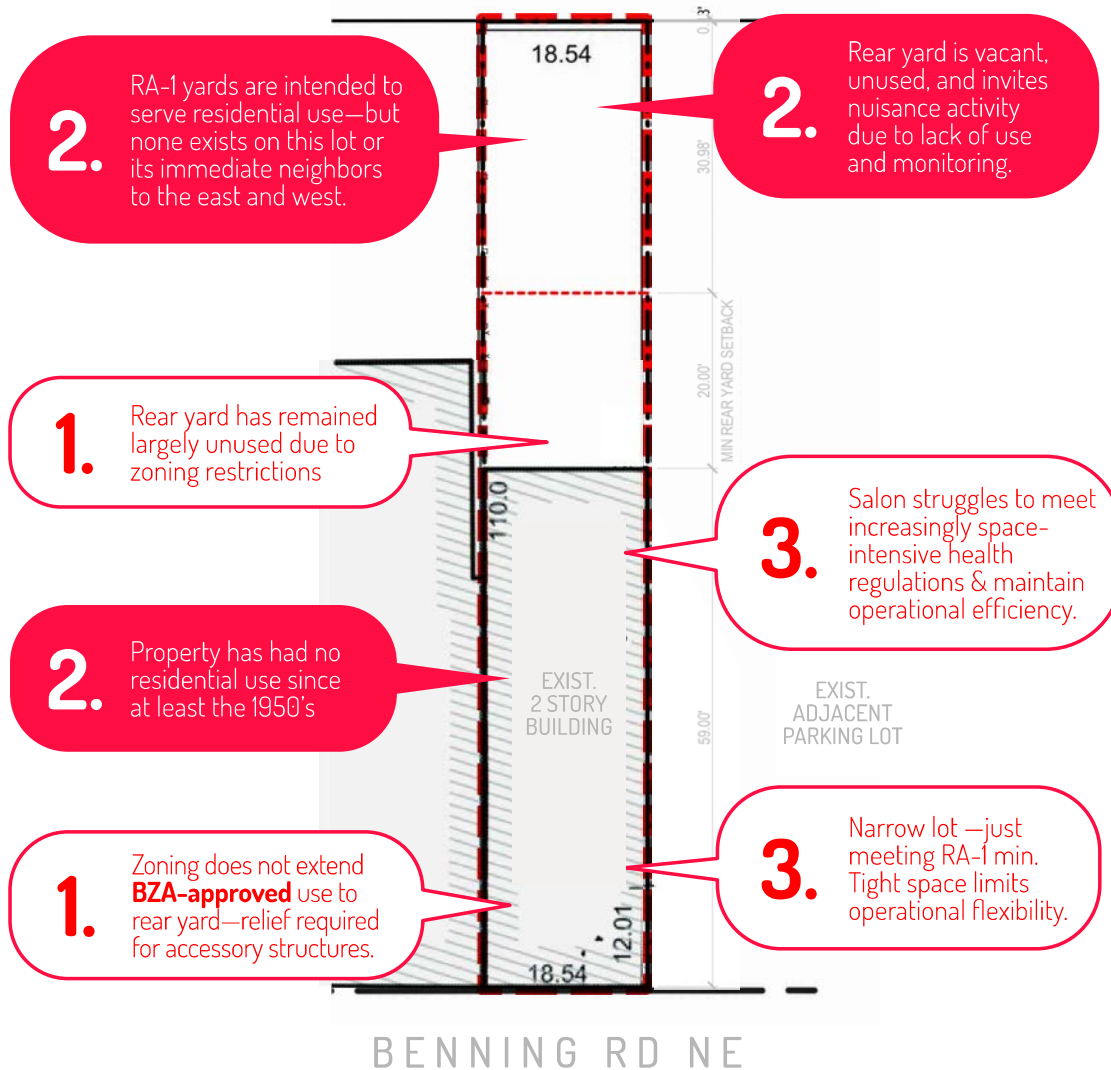
- Storage was 4.1 miles away, a 14-minute drive each way
- Daily delays disrupted operations and slowed service
- Essential supplies often unavailable when needed
- Heat-sensitive products spoiled, leading to waste

### RESULT:

- Lost revenue from damaged stock and missed sales
- Operational deficit that strained the business
- Reinforced the need for secure, on-site storage







## CONFLUENCE OF EXCEPTIONAL CONDITIONS INHERENT TO THE PROPERTY

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# TEST 2:

zoning restrictions impose an undue hardship on the owner

## 2. BURDEN ON THE OWNER...

### TOGETHER, THESE CONSTRAINTS GIVE RISE TO AN UNDUE HARDSHIP ON THE PROPERTY OWNER

- Strict application of the zoning regulations prevents the owner from making **reasonable use** of the full site to support the property's long-standing, BZA-approved non-conforming, commercial use.
- The building has no interior capacity to meet required sanitation, ventilation, and storage needs.
- Zoning prohibits rear yard improvements that would allow the business to function viably.
- Reverting to residential use is not a reasonable alternative due to decades of costly MEP modifications and layout retrofits.

### RESULT:

Without relief, the property cannot be used reasonably for its existing legal purpose.

# TEST 3:

no harm to public good or the zoning ordinance





PROJECT SITE BEHIND BUILDING



View of project site from Benning Road. Proposed accessory structures are concealed from the street



PROJECT SITE BEHIND BUILDING



View of project site from Benning Road. Proposed accessory structures are concealed from the street



PROJECT SITE



View of project site from Benning Road. Proposed accessory structures are obliquely visible from this portion of Benning Road.





PROJECT SITE VIEWED FROM NEIGHBORING PARKING LOT

# COMMUNITY SUPPORT

May 15, 2025

To Whom It May Concern,

It is with immense gratitude and admiration that I write this letter in support of Tsunami Hair Studio and its unwavering commitment to uplifting our community. Led by the visionary leadership and compassionate heart of Ms. LaToya Liles Walker, Tsunami Hair Studio has become more than just a business—it is a cornerstone of hope, generosity, and connection in Washington, D.C.

For nearly eleven years, I have had the privilege of being a client of Tsunami Hair Studio. Over time, I transitioned from a customer to feeling like part of the Tsunami family. It is this sense of belonging, care, and genuine humanity that sets Tsunami apart. Ms. Liles Walker's dedication to the people she serves goes far beyond providing hair services; she invests in their well-being and nurtures the soul of our community through countless acts of kindness.

Under Ms. Liles Walker's leadership, Tsunami Hair Studio has pioneered numerous initiatives that have profoundly impacted lives across the city. From food drives and clothing collections to healing the homeless and organizing toy and book-to-school drives, their generosity knows no bounds. Tsunami has been a lifeline for families, offering support during Christmas with donations for children's birthday items, celebrating seniors with potluck events, and hosting potluck community days filled with games and voter engagement. Ms. Liles Walker's commitment to creating opportunities for others and bringing joy to the community is truly remarkable.

The spirit of Tsunami Hair Studio is built on love, loyalty, and unwavering dedication to making the world a better place. Without their presence, the soul of our community would feel incomplete. The ripple effects of their service have touched countless lives, leaving an indelible mark that will be cherished for generations to come.

An Application Number 21287 for Tsunami Hair Studio is considered. I strongly urge recognition and support for this extraordinary establishment. Their contributions, led by Ms. Liles Walker's tireless efforts, have shaped our community into a beacon of hope and compassion. Tsunami Hair Studio exemplifies the power of giving and the beauty of connection—and they deserve every accolade for the immense good they continue to create.

Thank you for your time and consideration.


Sincerely,

**Sandra Wright**

Sandra Wright  
Client/Customer of  
Tsunami Hair Studio  
4248 Berrington Road NE, Washington, DC 20019

“Their efforts to host events, mentorship programs, and cultural celebrations have had a meaningful and positive impact on our neighborhood.”

— Jakhira Prince,  
Neighbor

 John Osborne <osborne@bigtent.design>

**Fwd: BZA Application 21287**  
1 message  
Sat, May 17, 2025 at 10:30 AM

**Tsunami Hair** <tsunamihairstudio@gmail.com>  
To: jake osborne <jos@bigtent-architects.net>

With Best Regards,  
LaToya J Walker

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** Jakhira Prince <jprince@bmdc.org>  
**Date:** May 16, 2025 at 7:58:43 PM EDT  
**To:** tsunamihairstudio@gmail.com  
**Cc:** Tsunami Hair <tsunamihairstudio@gmail.com>  
**Subject:** BZA Application 21287  
**Reply-To:** Jakhira Prince <jprince@bmdc.org>

To Tsunami Hair Studio and LaToya Liles Walker:

With deep gratitude and admiration, we, the members of this vibrant community, extend our heartfelt appreciation for the beacon of hope, fellowship, and inspiration that Tsunami Hair Studio represents. Under LaToya Liles Walker's extraordinary leadership, this space has become far more than a salon—it is a sanctuary where souls are nourished just as much as bodies are fed.


LaToya's unwavering passion and giving spirit shine brightly, touching the lives of so many in ways that words can scarcely capture. Her love of community is evident in every act of kindness, from offering her space for fellowship and healing back-to-school events, fun days, and awareness gatherings, to simply creating a haven where laughter, encouragement, and learning are embraced.

Tsunami Hair Studio is not just a business—it is a cornerstone of Ward 7, a place where friendships are formed, confidence is restored, and the beauty within each person is recognized, celebrated, and enhanced. Stepping through its doors, one is welcomed not only with professionalism and warmth but with prayers, hope, and the comforting embrace of community.

In a world that often moves too fast, Tsunami Hair Studio reminds us to pause, connect, and uplift one another. It is, undeniably, the heartbeat of Ward 7: an irreplaceable pillar of strength, love, and service. This would not be the same without it, and we are profoundly grateful for the light it continues to bring into our lives.

Thank you, LaToya, for your vision, your generosity, and your tireless dedication to making this community stronger, more united, and ever more beautiful—made and out.

With appreciation and love,  
The Community of Ward 7  
Temesha Mayfield  
Yahoo Mail Search, Organize, Compare

 Tsunami Hair <tsunamihairstudio@gmail.com>

**Application No. 21287 of Tsunami Hair Studio**  
1 message  
Wed, Apr 30, 2025 at 8:43 PM

**Jakhira Prince** <jprince@bmdc.org>  
To: tsunamihairstudio@gmail.com  
Cc: Tsunami Hair <tsunamihairstudio@gmail.com>

Dear Board of Zoning Adjustment,

I am writing to express my strong support for Tsunami Hair Studio's application for expansion.

Tsunami Hair Studio has consistently provided not only excellent personal care services but also a safe and welcoming space for community engagement and empowerment. Their efforts to host events, mentorship programs, and cultural celebrations have had a meaningful and positive impact on our neighborhood.


Granting their request to expand would allow them to continue and grow these contributions, further uplifting the community through employment, accessible services, and inclusive events. I respectfully urge the BZA to approve their application.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Jakhira Prince  
108 North Bentalou st.  
Baltimore MD 21223  
202.883.1057

“Tsunami Hair Studio has become more than just a business—it is a cornerstone of hope, generosity, and connection in Washington, D.C.”

— Sandra Wright,  
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**Tsunami Hair** <tsunamihairstudio@gmail.com>  
To: jake osborne <jos@bigtent-architects.net>

With Best Regards,  
LaToya J Walker

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** Deborah Jones <djones@bmdc.org>  
**Date:** May 16, 2025 at 4:56:22 PM EDT  
**To:** tsunamihairstudio@gmail.com  
**Cc:** Balaadevi Ogoyele <ogoyeb@bmdc.org>, Eldridge Allen <allen@bmdc.org>, Paul Spies <pspies@bmdc.org>  
**Subject:** Application No. 21287 of Tsunami Hair Studio

Dear BZA Review Team,

The Marshall Heights Community Development Organization (MHCOO) fully supports the Tsunami Hair Studio's application for a special exception to place a shipping container.

Over the past 11 years, LaToya Liles-Walker, CEO, has taken her business from a tenant to property owner at 4248 Berrington Road NE. She has been an excellent neighbor and is very involved in the community. LaToya always finds time to produce fashion and hair shows for events, including Art All Night and Open Streets in Ward 7.

In addition, Ms. Liles-Walker conducts cosmetology and entrepreneurship training classes. She mentors students and provides well-being sessions to help young people take control of their emotions during different life situations.

A shipping container will help with her plans to expand her business and service offerings. We would love to see her grow.

**Deborah Jones**  
Small Business Technical Assistance Program Counselor  
Marshall Heights Community Development Organization  
202-450-5630 • djones@bmdc.org • www.bmdc.org  
\*\*\*\*\*

 John Osborne <osborne@bigtent.design>

**Fwd: Tsunami Hair Studio Support Ltr/ Application No 21287**  
1 message  
Sat, May 17, 2025 at 10:30 AM

**Tsunami Hair** <tsunamihairstudio@gmail.com>  
To: jake osborne <jos@bigtent-architects.net>

With Best Regards,  
LaToya J Walker

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** Dorcen Robinson <dorcen@bmdc.org>  
**Date:** May 16, 2025 at 3:10:54 PM EDT  
**To:** tsunamihairstudio@gmail.com  
**Subject:** Tsunami Hair Studio Support Ltr/ Application No 21287

Good Afternoon,

This letter is in reference to application #21287, Tsunami Hair studio and its CEO LaToya J Liles Walker is a bright light to Ward 7. They represent what hard work, family values, a consistent work ethic and belief in oneself is able to accomplish. During the 11 years Tsunami has brought so much to the community and as a business in Ward 7 the name is known throughout the Cosmetology world in the DMV area (with numerous awards, acknowledgements and accolades).

Since arriving in Ward 7 Tsunami has been a part of and has headed multiple events (Feeding the homeless during the Thanksgiving holiday, DC night out, Cat Walk @ H at Day, Open street DC, A total potluck makeover for a student from Paul High School diagnosed with Cancer, Life before penner party, yearly Customer Appreciation Day and annual training programs) just to name a few outside events.

Tsunami's CEO her staff also recognize and celebrate each other monthly (birthdays, anniversaries, years of service, suitable accolades and other accomplishments).

Thank you for your attention to application No 21287, Tsunami Hair Studio will use it to continue to operate in excellence within the community, be that colorful beacon in Ward 7 and beyond the District of Columbia.

Respectfully,  
Ms. Dorcen

 John Osborne <osborne@bigtent.design>

**Fwd: Letter of Support for Tsunami Hair Studio BZA Application No. 21287.**  
1 message  
Sat, May 17, 2025 at 10:31 AM

**Tsunami Hair** <tsunamihairstudio@gmail.com>  
To: jake osborne <jos@bigtent-architects.net>

With Best Regards,  
LaToya J Walker

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** Wallace Lee <wlee@bmdc.org>  
**Date:** May 16, 2025 at 7:03:19 PM EDT  
**To:** tsunamihairstudio@gmail.com  
**Cc:** Tsunami Hair <tsunamihairstudio@gmail.com>  
**Subject:** Letter of Support for Tsunami Hair Studio BZA Application No. 21287.

Dear Members of the Board of Zoning Adjustment,

I am writing this letter as a loyal client and proud supporter of Tsunami Hair Studio to express my full support for their BZA Application No. 21287.

For over a decade, Tsunami Hair Studio has been more than just a salon—it has been a vital part of the Ward 7 community. Under the leadership of LaToya Liles-Walker, the studio has consistently delivered excellent service while building a space that fosters confidence, education, and opportunity.

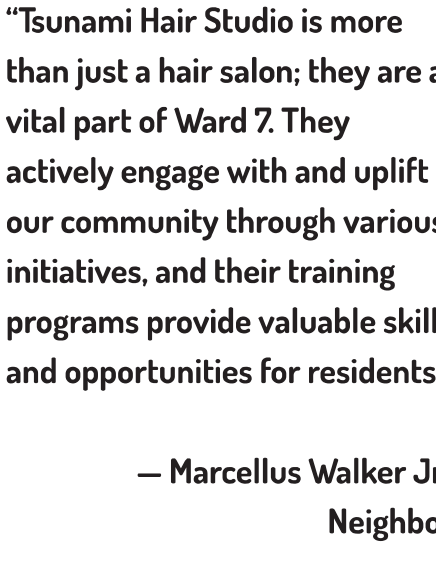
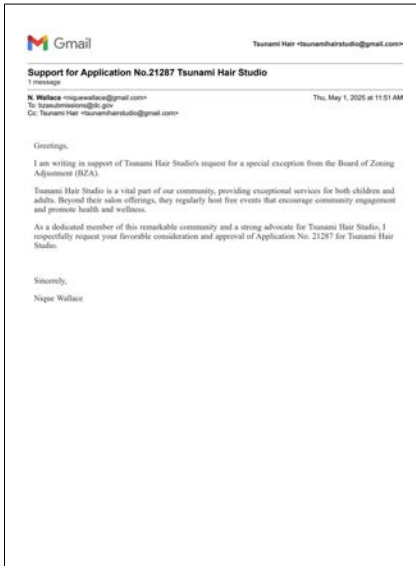
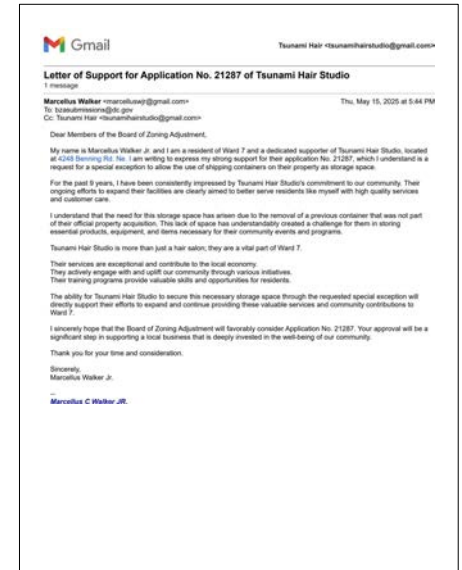
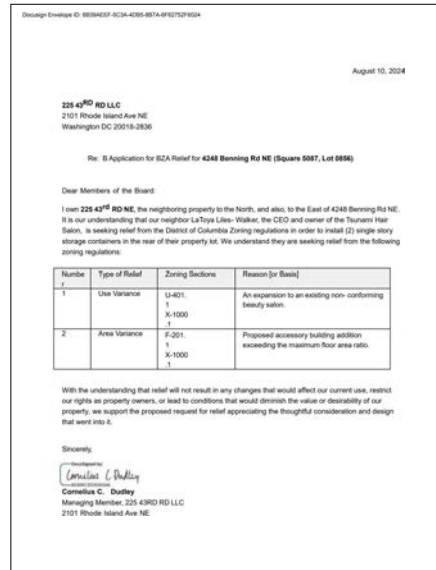
Tsunami Hair Studio has made a lasting impact through job creation, mentorship, and hands-on training for aspiring cosmetologists, especially women of color. Their efforts in promoting green business practices and supporting those affected by hair loss due to medical and environmental conditions further reflect their deep commitment to both health and community wellness.

The original investments continued growth and positive transformation, not only for the business, but for the surrounding neighborhood. I strongly urge you to approve Tsunami Hair Studio's application, which will allow them to expand their services and continue uplifting our community.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Wallace Lee





# CONCLUSION

## CONCLUSION & REQUEST FOR RELIEF

### Exceptional Conditions

- Small, narrow lot fully built out with no interior flexibility
- Rear yard zoning misaligned with legal commercial use
- Rear yard no longer serves intended RA-1 residential purpose

### Undue Hardship

- Strict enforcement prevents reasonable use of the full site
- Lack of interior space hinders compliance with health and safety codes
- Reversion to residential use is financially impractical

### No Harm to Public Good or Zoning Plan

- Improvements are minor, non-public-facing, and screened from view
- Commercial/residential mix is common along this corridor
- ANC and community strongly support continued operation

**We respectfully request the Board grant the requested use and area variances, so that this long-standing neighborhood-serving small business can continue to operate safely, viably, and in full compliance with modern standards.**





RENDERING OF PROPOSED TRAILERS INSTALLED BEHIND NEW WOOD FENCE

# THANK YOU