

July 15, 2019

Zoning Commission of the District of Columbia
441 4th Street, NW
Second Floor
Washington, DC 20001

Re: Letter of Support – Application of Masjid Muhammad Inc.
for Approval of a Zoning Map Amendment in Square 5790

Dear Members of the Commission:

My name is Amir N. Muhammad, a Ward 8 resident for more than 25 years, homeowner, and a Ward 8 business owner. I am also the founder, CEO and Curator of America's Islamic Heritage Museum (the "Museum"), a non-profit Ward 8 organization established in the District since September 1996. I am writing to express my full support for Masjid Muhammad's Application for Approval of a Zoning Map Amendment in Square 5790.

I am an author of five books about the history of Muslims in America and one about the history of Masjid Muhammad and the early Muslims of Washington, DC. I am one of Masjid Muhammad's community historians and one of the country's Muslim community historians.

The Museum has been in our current location at the former Clara Muhammad School located at 2315 Martin Luther King Jr. Ave SE going on 10 years, since December 2010. We opened our doors to the public in April 2011.

Prior to opening the Museum, I was the Office Manager / Treasurer for Masjid Muhammad for 16 years from 1992 until 2008. Masjid Muhammad has been the owner of the building at 2313-2315 Martin Luther King Jr. Ave SE since 1973. The community has gone through various name changes over the years from Muhammad's Holy Temple of Islam, Muhammad Temple #4, the World Community of Islam in the West, America Muslim Mission, Muslim American Society to its current name Masjid Muhammad, also known as the Nations Mosque.

Mr. William R. Day, who submitted a letter in opposition to the Map Amendment submitted by Masjid Muhammad, makes various factually inaccurate statements in his letter. In February 26, 1975, the majority of the Muslim community of the Nation of Islam ("NOI") voted Imam Warith Deen Mohammed as the new leader for the Nation of Islam community. From the very beginning of the Nation of Islam, the first leader Fard Mohammed, even Elijah Muhammad and Sister Clara Muhammad taught that their son Wallace D. Mohammed would become the next leader of the NOI community. This is a known, documented and historical fact.

The Clara on Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue LLC (which entered into a joint venture with Masjid Muhammad and its non-profit CDC), has worked with the Museum to develop a program that allows the Museum to come back into the newly developed project with a much larger space (7,000 square feet) that will house the history and contributions of Muslims in America and of Washington, DC. The name of the project "The Clara on Martin Luther King" is in honor of Sister Clara Muhammad and her great work in education, including where a former school named in her honor was housed prior to the Museum moving into the space in 2010.

The building where the Museum is located (2315 Martin Luther King) is not listed in the inventory of historic sites, nor is it registered on the National Register of Historic places. Furthermore, the location of the building is not located in historic Anacostia.

As background, the mission of America's Islamic Heritage Museum (the "Museum") is to collect, preserve, and display the rich historical narrative of Islamic heritage in America and provide cultural educational programming for the public in the United States and abroad. We envision a global community that preserves American Islamic history, embraces their contributions to that history, and builds bridges of understanding to ensure an American culture free of ethnic hatred through an understanding of our rich cultural and ethnic heritage.

The Museum programs provide high-quality arts and humanities cultural programs that highlight America's rich Islamic history and diversity. Through our cultural enrichment and social services programming, we promote understanding and appreciation of our shared history and common humanity, particularly within the Ward 8 community.

We provide Museum tours daily for individuals and groups, while adjusting the presentation to visitor characteristics to ensure engagement and learning.

Our Scholars' Corner program is a speaker series that links civic and cultural institutions and their representatives by facilitating discussion sessions that broaden understanding of how our nation's cultural, social, and political histories intertwine to create the American experience. These facilitated sessions bring together humanities scholars and inter-faith leaders to discuss and explain modern social and political realities in a community forum, which ensures productive and rich conversation and debate. Moreover, Scholars' Corner is a valuable tool for audiences, as it provides facilitated critical thinking opportunities for those interested in or exposed to Islam, as well as those unfamiliar with issues in the Muslim community. Our Community Engagement Outreach Program lays the foundation for deeper exploration into the community as a social development tool where the Museum partners with local community organizations, religious institutions and government initiatives to provide targeted social services to this high risk, high needs community (Wards 7 and 8). By virtue of its prime location - within walking distance from schools and the Anacostia Metro Station – the Museum is ideally positioned on Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue to serve as a hub for youth and young adults to access social services. Through our Community Outreach Program, the Museum:

- Provides after-school programming that includes snacks, STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and math) activities, and mentoring for youth.
- Taps information technology and business professionals from the community to mentor and provide skills development workshops for the unemployed of Wards 7 and 8 neighborhoods.
- Distributes food monthly to individuals and families in need of healthy, wholesome foods.
- Provides space to other inner-city groups to hold sessions for adults and youth.

Our Arts and Culture program showcases both Muslim and non-Muslim artists by providing a public venue, and access and exposure to the local community. The programming consists of a diverse range of the arts including short plays, films, book signings, discussions, cultural art exhibits, performances, and various cultural forms of expressions that highlight cultural diversity, creativity, and build public appreciation for the arts. The Arts and Culture program also fosters partnerships between artists and community organizations to reach American urban youth. The impact of the arts experience combined with the historical context of the Museum is multifold. It facilitates student learning, enhances creativity, reinforces self-discipline, elevates self-esteem, and develops the skills and confidence needed to meet everyday challenges.

Over the years, America's Islamic Heritage Museum has played a vital role in maintaining the history of Muslims in America and a valuable role in serving community members of Ward 7/8 and the residents of Washington, DC, with educational and social services programs.

America's Islamic Heritage Museum is in total support of the Proposed Map Amendment and will be directly affected by the Zoning Board's decision.

Respectfully,

Amir N Muhammad

Amir Muhammad

AIHM CEO/President and Curator