

March 6, 2022

Dear Members of the Zoning Commission:

We are interested and impacted homeowners living in ANC4C at 4708 15th Street, NW, writing to express our opposition to the development plan and application of Dance Loft Ventures LLC seeking: (1) a Map Amendment; (2) a PUD ZC 21-18 to upzone the site from MU-3A to an MU-5A Zone; and (3) additional density through the Mandatory Inclusionary Zoning (MIZ) process (“Dance Loft Project Venture PUD”). As further outlined below, we oppose the size, height, and density (“Impact Issues”) of the Dance Loft Ventures PUD 101-unit project in this residential neighborhood where the RF-1 zoned two-story town homes in Square 2704 will be significantly dwarfed.

The application of the Dance Loft Project Ventures PUD for 4618 14th Street NW (Lots 64 & 828, and 830-832 and 823 in square 2704) proposes an increased height from 40’0’ to 66’8’ feet with an additional penthouse, for a total built height of 75’4” plus an additional 6’6” of rooftop enclosure for condensing units and solar panels. If approved as proposed, this property almost doubles the existing MU-3A zone height maximum of 40’0.” Moreover, the Dance Loft Project Ventures PUD seeks to extend the entire mass of the proposed building from the eastern lot boundary 295 feet to the west into the alley areas directly behind single- and two-family row houses, overshadowing the existing 100+ year-old residential development. The topography of the site trends to 20 feet above the measuring point on 14th Street at the western end of the development resulting in a development that, at its lowest point, tops out at 58’0” plus an additional 6’6” of rooftop enclosure for condensing units and solar panels, above the adjacent row houses, typically only 22’0” to 25’0” at their highest elevation in the rear yards facing the proposed Dance Loft Ventures PUD.

We have read the Office of Planning set-down report and have also been actively engaged in efforts to responsibly address the Impact Issues of the Dance Loft Project Ventures PUD. Most supporters of the project will not live in the shadows of this 75’4” (plus an additional 6’6” of rooftop enclosure for condensing units and solar panels) that will be less than 400 feet from our property. Proponents of the project who live outside of square 2704 and, in some instances, outside of the District of Columbia, continue to reference that the addition of this 5-story residential building (plus setback penthouse level) will bring a reasonable increase in density along a major commercial corridor such as 14th Street, ignoring that the residential properties on the streets that abut the Dance Loft property, namely the 1400 block of Buchanan Street, 1400 block of Crittenden Street, and the 4600 block of 15th Street ARE NOT major commercial corridors. Indeed, the distance from the Dance Loft property line to all abutting residential properties is far less than the distance to properties on the 14th street commercial corridor that are adjacent to the Dance Loft property. The technical requirements of the Comprehensive Plan and its recent amendments are being used against abutting homeowners. This is not a building of “modest size” and is completely out of place in this DC neighborhood and any other DC neighborhood where a property this size would sit in such close proximity to row houses of much lesser height.

The proposed building with 101 units also will have a very negative impact on existing parking issues throughout the neighborhood. Most units are intended for families, and families need cars to care for family members. This neighborhood does not have supermarkets within walking distance. Families who will live in the building require cars to grocery shop, drive children to daycare, and otherwise care for family members. It is unfair to expect families to cope without sufficient parking provided at the building, particularly when neighborhood parking is so limited. Because lot sizes of most existing houses in the neighborhood are too small to accommodate parking spaces, current residents' ability to care for their family members will be adversely affected, as well.

Achieving retail and commercial vitality in our neighborhood can still be accomplished if the height of the building is addressed primarily from the 14th Street side of the property, which is the only major commercial corridor— the 1400 blocks of Crittenden and Buchanan Streets and the 4600 block of 15th Street ARE NOT major commercial corridors. The alleged reasonable increase in density sought by the Dance Loft project should and could be accomplished at the front of the property along the 14th Street commercial corridor. However, the Dance Loft Property Ventures PUD project continues to respond that it is not “financially feasible” based on their budget. There has been no sign of consideration given to this central concern.

As longtime homeowners (32 years) in this neighborhood, we are obviously interested and invested in the city's health and our neighborhood's vitality. The impact of the Dance Loft Ventures PUD, as currently proposed, is a substantial detriment to the enjoyment of our property and investment, and we implore the Zoning Commission to stand in the shoes of the abutting and nearby property owners, and push for responsible, sensible and harmonious development. The pleas of many for responsible development have continued to fall on deaf ears. **We respectfully ask that this Commission reduce the density sought in this project, require most of the density to largely face the commercial corridor, and right-size the height of the rear of the building to decrease the impact on the abutting properties on Crittenden, Buchanan and 15th Streets, and reject the Comprehensive Plan amendments.**

We understand and are sympathetic with proponents stressing the need for projects like this, and we believe that affordability achieved in a balanced way, with mixed incomes, attractive architecture, and arts preservation, can contribute to the neighborhood. To be clear, that is not what is in dispute and not what we oppose. **We oppose amending the existing MU-3A zone height maximum of 40'0 to allow for a building that would almost double the existing height limits, along with the size and density proposed in the application. We urge you to require the project to focus its design height on the 14th Street commercial corridor and reduce the impact to abutting homes, along with density and size, and to provide sufficient parking for the building's future residents.**

Sincerely,
Elizabeth and Thomas Gross
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Washington, DC 20011