

DC Office of Zoning
441 4th Street, NW #200S
Washington, DC 20001

March 10, 2022

Re: ZC Case Number 21-18, Dance Loft Ventures, LLC.

Members of the Zoning Commission:

As a 16th Street Heights resident living within a quarter mile radius of the proposed PUD, I am **writing in opposition** to the development plan and application request made by Dance Loft Ventures, LLC to amend the zoning map to up-zone the commercial building space located at 4608-4618 14th Street NW (Square 2704, Lots 64, 815, 819, 821, 823, 828, 830, 831, 832, 833) from the existing MU-3 to MU-5 to build a PUD. The current MU-3 designation applies to the 14th Street business strip which services the RF-1 residential neighborhood.

The proposed plans are for a seven level, five story 101-unit apartment building with parking, and one and a half floors dedicated as dance – related business space for the Dance Loft. Heleos, the development company, is requesting a change to the zoning map because they state that they are unable to build without the MU-5 designation. This massive groundscraper will dwarf the surrounding RF-1 residential properties, none of which will be improved by the PUD development. The scale of the building goes well beyond any other building in the neighborhood; 92 properties will be directly impacted.

This property is being pitched as having 66% “affordable housing” units, but there is **no written guarantee** that these units will remain “affordable housing” units for the life of the project. There seems to be some problem, on the part of the developers, to clarify the actual count, and size, of the units, both on the architectural plans submitted, and on the plans which were pitched to the neighborhood. Who will own, or manage, these apartments? Is preferential treatment going to artists, as the Dance Loft intimates? Is that not a form of discrimination which could preclude the “affordable housing” lender agreements?

This will be a very large building with ongoing upkeep and repair costs. Given the limited financial means of the owners, with their dependence on grant money to survive, this PUD project could be abandoned, and allowed to fall into disrepair, leaving the immediate neighbors and tenants with major problems, and huge expenses. Answers have been vague when Dance Loft employees have been asked about a property management group.

Heleos has pitched this massive development project as being net-zero, LEED approved, and self-sustaining, but also mentions that, because of the size of the building, solar arrays will have to be installed on “neighboring businesses”, or on “neighboring residences.” The Dance Loft already has solar panels. LEED design is not a plus, but a given; this is not a sales point.

No DDOT report has been filed. Major traffic and parking issues will affect the neighborhood, from 16th Street, NW to 14th Street, NW.

No WASA report has been filed. Clean water, and proper waste management are a given, not a sales point. Brown water, sewage back-ups, and basement sewage stench should not be the burden and responsibility of the neighboring residents and businesses.

There is no mention of the installation and use of water efficient and low energy appliances; no electrical car charging stations are being offered. These, are, in fact, elements that should be guaranteed by the builders as part of the LEED / net-zero process.

The developers' answer to the obvious parking problem is to install a mechanical car lift in the garage to add more parking spaces. The solution is a cumbersome one and presents more problems than it solves; it is not a sales point.

The current commercial building, allowed to fall into disrepair, is also occupied by six storefront businesses which provide services to the neighborhood. These businesses will be forced to close and move elsewhere. Three storefront commercial spaces are part of the plans, but no information has been given as to whether these retail stores will be independent.

The Heleos sales pitch of people from Dance Loft "spilling out onto the sidewalk" strikes fear in the hearts of the many in the neighborhood who have endured late night outdoor parties, loud music, and screaming customers. In fact, the proposed design works perfectly for one of several DC arts and entertainment zones, or for Node Three, further up 14th Street, which has been designated as an arts area, and not in a residential neighborhood which cannot handle, or support, the impacts this massive building presents.

There is absolutely no reason why this one large lot on this small business strip should need to be up-zoned when the land is sufficient to accommodate both tenant and visitor. The developers could easily go back to the architects' drawing board to reduce the scale of the building to better blend in with the surrounding businesses and residences, and to be more harmonious in design, with better solutions, keeping the MU-3 zoning designation to "allow minimum impact on the surrounding residences."

Our ANC commissioner has not been forthcoming about protecting the interests of the neighbors, or businesses, immediately impacted. **No development amenities or packages have been negotiated, no conditions or stipulations have been placed on the developers and owners.**

Finally, for the record, contrary to the boiler plate sales pitch presented by Heleos:

There has been a lot of new development in the neighborhood in the past ten years.

A large, four-story apartment building, with "inclusionary zoning", is currently under construction at 1521 Varnum Street, NW. Home renovations, and total residential gut and remodeling are thriving businesses in 16th Street Heights. Many houses have updated, basement rental units which are tenant occupied, the rents of which are reasonable.

Ward 4 is undergoing redistricting changes due to an increase in population; the neighborhood of 16th Street Heights is affected.

The Dance Loft is not the “unique to the corridor.”

The Dance Institute of Washington, a leading minority-led dance equity organization, founded by Fabian Barnes, is located at 3400 14th Street, NW. It is accessible by the Green Line metro, the 14th Street bus lines, and several cross-town H bus lines. The famous Jones-Haywood Dance School (1200 Delafield Place, NW), in 16th Street Heights, was founded in 1941; the Salsa with Silvia Dance Studio (3232 Georgia Avenue, NW) is close by.

All of the locations offer studio rental space, in addition to several other locations in Columbia Heights. There are several vacant dance studio spaces available in DC which are not in disrepair. The Dance Loft is not a new venture and is not considered to be a “benefit to those within the neighborhood”; the closing of six businesses which service the community will be a great loss.

New business development projects are underway along “Node Two”.

As part of the Node Two Small Area Plan for this stretch of 14th Street, NW, running from Webster to Decatur Streets, NW, the Bus Barn anchor project, and the recently proposed 65-unit, senior citizen, affordable housing project by Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority (4411 14th Street, NW) are under review.

In conclusion, I respectfully request that the Zoning Commissioners deny the map amendment request by Dance Loft Ventures, LLC.

Sincerely,

Jane Bush

Jane Bush
1516 Webster Street, NW