

Dear Members of the Zoning Commission, Councilmember George and ANC 4C commissioners:

I'm writing as a resident of ANC 4C03 to express opposition to the proposed redevelopment of the Dance Loft building at 4618 14th St NW. I live within a couple blocks of the proposed project. I oppose the current proposal for the following reasons:

Aesthetics

You say "the architectural design and detailing are intended to be ... sympathetic of the surrounding residential context." For me, the proposed apartment building would be an aesthetically jarring and stylistically inappropriate addition to the neighborhood and would open the door to more oversized buildings.

The low-rise profile of the two-block commercial area on 14th Street has been maintained for most of a century (with the exception of one anomalous two-story house in the 4700 block). The redevelopment of the bus barn will have new, taller setback construction rising to 47 feet behind the restored original façade. But even this would be dwarfed by a huge, 66-foot housing project across the street.

The Park Theatre with its two-story façade, is the human-scale centerpiece of its block. Even the auditorium building behind it rises only to about 40 feet, which I don't think disturbs the unity of the block. A multi-story apartment building looming at a height of 66 feet over the area would destroy the scale and character of the area.

Granting an exemption on building height limits would open the door to the northward creep of what I call "shipping-crate architecture": tall, cheaply constructed, anonymous rectangles of apartments. I do not want this kind of characterless development in this neighborhood. I'm not suggesting the PUD is an example of this architectural trend, but its approval will give a green light to other developers who will build taller and cheaper. Our neighborhood should draw the line and demand that current height limits be restrained.

I wonder if the theater façade, which is a separate structure from the theater proper and is about 12 feet deep, might be preserved. Preserving the façade would honor the neighborhood's history and also signal to passers-by that the building does indeed contain a performing arts space.

Parking and Congestion

We do not have “ample street parking” here. Parking has diminished over the 21 years I’ve lived here. You say “the Project contains more than enough spaces to serve the residential, Dance Loft, and retail/commercial uses.” I find that difficult to believe, and more likely that the potential addition of 60 or more vehicles seeking street parking will impact neighborhood livability.

For the record, I do use public transportation frequently, but I also need a car. Despite our neighborhood’s proximity to 2 bus lines and 2 Metro stations, it is extremely difficult to get to many places around D.C. via public transportation. And despite the laughable urban vision that we’ll all be biking and scootering and walking and busing and Metro-ing everywhere in the near future, for some residents at least, biking or walking is out of the question. I would guess that at least half the residents on my block do not use bicycles.

I am also concerned that the only vehicle access to the building will be a 15-foot-wide alley. Trash trucks and some deliveries will use the alley, and an emergency vehicle could be blocked from entry.

Community Benefits

The building currently has Dance Loft space for classes and performance and for other arts organizations to use; plus retail shops. After the proposed project is completed, we’ll have lost probably one or two businesses, and Dance Loft will have space for classes and performance and for other arts organizations to use; plus retail shops. Pretty much what we now have. I fail to see what great benefits the project will provide to neighbors.

Sincerely,
Brian Miller
1423 Allison Street NW