



14th St. Uptown Business Association



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**Taalib-Din Abdul-Uqdah, President**

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**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF**

**Z.C. CASE NO. 21-18 (DANCE LOFT VENTURES, LLC)**

*Application for a Consolidated PUD and Map Amendment*

*@ Square 2704, Lots 64, 815, 819, 821, 823, 828, and 830-833*

BY

**TAALIB-DIN UQDAH**  
**obo/1-4 UBA**  
**14<sup>th</sup> St. Uptown Business Association**

BEFORE THE

**ZONING COMMISSION**  
*Virtual Public Hearing*

**MONDAY, MAY 05, 2022**  
**4:00 PM**

My name is Taalib-Din Uqdah. I'm testifying before you today both personally and as the founder and president of the 14<sup>th</sup> St. Uptown Business Association (1-4 UBA), in support of ZC Case #21-18; and in that support, you are allowed to view me as having a double-vested interest in its success. I own a commercial property roughly 150ft. from the Dance Loft/Heleos project and I live and own another commercial property, 7-blocks North of it. I view myself as having a personal interest in this project; I live here – this is my community – and a business interest – I own two commercial properties along the 14<sup>th</sup> St. corridor; therefore, it's safe to say, I'm significantly more invested than most.

I'm a native Washingtonian, 70-year's old, and have lived, gone to school or owned businesses in every quadrant of this city. I've been an entrepreneur for 48 of those years, having started my first business (1974) selling Xmas trees at the corner of MLK & Good Hope Rd. Two-years later, on that same corner, I built Southeast's first 24-hour open-air market – 1<sup>st</sup> Stop – that transformed that neighborhood. The late Warren "Fab" Fisher, a photographer for the Washington Afro-American, described 1<sup>st</sup> Stop as being "*a rose in the Ghetto.*"

What Fisher and others recognized, was I had vision, and that vision has carried me all these years to recognize the value in this Dance Loft/Heleos project, even if others don't see it; the vision doesn't go away. The only difference I see, and why I support this effort, is that it's a classic case of "*a rising tide lifting all boats.*"

It's going to be good for 1-4 UBA's organizational membership, and for me personally – I don't deny that – good for the community, when other arts and small area retail follow – and good for the city, when it can say, this is how we – citizens and government – work together for a common vision.

In the Fall of 2008, after the Council approved the Kennedy St. corridor Small Area Plan, (SAP), (then) Councilwoman Muriel Bowser held a sub-committee hearing, taking testimony on an OP / DMPED-sponsored amendment to expand the Kennedy St. corridor from 5<sup>th</sup> St., West, to North Capitol. Other than testimony from the Executive Branch – OP and DMPED – one other person, (now) a former commissioner and myself, on behalf of 1-4 UBA, registered and testified as public witnesses, in support of the expansion; there was no opposition.

There was no opposition that is, until later during the Q&A. OP and DMPED objected to my testimony that offered an Amendment to the Bill that called for even further expansion of the corridor along 14<sup>th</sup> St., from Spring Rd. to Longfellow, including Colorado Ave. To my surprise, the Councilwoman accepted our proposal, amended the bill, and got it out of committee for unanimous passage by the full Council.

Twelve years-ago because of that action, OP initiated a strategy for the Central 14th Street corridor that includes the neighborhoods of 16th Street Heights, Brightwood, Crestwood, Petworth, and Columbia Heights. The purpose of the Plan has always been to direct economic growth along 14<sup>th</sup> Street and improve neighborhood serving retail and other amenities along the corridor. It also looked at key development opportunity sites and offered recommendations on how they should be developed.<sup>1</sup> The project before you today – ZC Case #21-18 – is an outgrowth of that work we put in to get us here; there’s no question we support this.

The maturation of 14<sup>th</sup> Street’s strategies for planning and revitalization occurred between October 2010 and April 2011; OP held no fewer than ten (10) public meetings, all in the 16<sup>th</sup> St. Heights community:<sup>2</sup>

- 5 at Northern Bus Garage;
- 2 at Powell ES;
- 2 at Kingsbury, (now LAMB PCS); and
- 1 at West (now John Lewis ES) – all open to the public.

There was ample opportunity for all interested persons to participate in the process. To make sure, OP established a non-governmental Advisory Committee and Small Business Committee, which I served on. It was our collective responsibility to offer feedback and guidance on OP’s public process and to comment on the Draft Plan’s recommendations. 1-4 UBA was part of that process, and the 2008 Kennedy St. SAP.

For the 14<sup>th</sup> St. Strategic Plan, OP provided a 30-Day Public Comment Period between February 22, 2012, through March 23, 2012, and hosted a Mayoral Hearing on March 22, 2012. During that time OP responded to comments received by residents during the public comment period and incorporated those into the new draft plan, now known as the Central 14<sup>th</sup> Street Vision Plan and Revitalization Strategy. The Council of the District of Columbia approved the plan through R-19-0689 on July 2, 2012.

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<sup>1</sup> See Development Concept Attachment and Node 2 Design Guidance (Page 35 – faded-background rendering of Dance Loft/Heleos Project): From Central 14<sup>th</sup> St. Vision Plan & Revitalization Strategy

<sup>2</sup> See Public Meetings Pages (3): From Central 14<sup>th</sup> St. Vision Plan & Revitalization Strategy

This project gets our support; it's what we were looking for when I bought my 2<sup>nd</sup> commercial property in 2002, 20-years ago. It's what I was looking for in 2004, when 1-4 UBA was founded, and it continued to be what I was looking for in 2007 – 15-years ago – when I became a part of the Advisory Committee for Kennedy St.; I made history on that street 36-years later, with an exhibit that's now on the 4<sup>th</sup> Floor of the Smithsonian Institute's Museum of African American History & Culture.

I joined those efforts then because I had vision; I knew what I wanted but needed to know and understand the process and procedures OP would use in implementing its strategic guidance for a neighborhood small area plan.

I knew then that I was going to push for the same process along 14<sup>th</sup> St., since I now owned two properties along the same strip; it just made good business sense. I support this project because it represents a collective vision of those of us who live, work and own property in this community. We worked tirelessly to see this come into fruition. Did we get everything we wanted? No! I'm still disappointed in this city's lack of vision when it comes to maintaining Northern Garage as a diesel-fueled bus depot right in the heart of a residential neighborhood; we had plans for that too.

But now I urge you to support this effort, grant the Applicant's request under your consideration and allow this project to fulfill that collective vision.

Thank you for your time in reading and considering my letter of support for the Dance Loft/Heleos Project – ZC Case #21-18 – I remain available to answer any further questions or clarify any of my comments in support of this project.

Taalib-Din Uqdah, Ward 4 Resident  
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