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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/Heels 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  
1373 Jefferson St., NW

Taalib-Din Uqdah, President/Commercial Property Owner  
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## Development Concept

### 2a) Value Furniture Site

As the second largest site (75,000 square feet) with single ownership, this property has the best redevelopment potential within the next five years because it is located mid-block, has good visibility, a deep footprint, singularly owned, and two separate alley access points. The development concept includes ground floor retail, ideal for a neighborhood grocery, with two to three floors of residential above. Parking is a concern for residents and businesses and should be part of any redevelopment. To facilitate development, this plan proposes to modify the current Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Map designation of low-density commercial to mixed use moderate density residential and commercial. This modification would apply to those properties fronting 14th Street between Allison Street and Decatur Street and would enable an appropriate increase in zoning. The commercially zoned properties fronting on the east side of 14th Street, from Allison to Webster, should remain a hard use classification per the Comprehensive Plan of low-density commercial. This part of 14th Street serves as a natural transitional block for lower density commercial uses and is compatible with the residential uses on the west side of the corridor.



Value Furniture Proposed Site Concept





Proposed Design Guidelines Illustrated

### Node Two Design Guidance

New development targeted for the Value Furniture site should include residential infill at the top with ground floor retail at the bottom.

The surrounding residential uses between Crittenden and Buchanan consist of single-family homes with rear yards backing to the opportunity site. In all cases, height and density should front on 14th Street and step back away from existing residential neighborhoods.

To decrease the appearance of mega blocks, storefront improvement should be consistent with the corridor's existing, neighborhood-serving retail character.

To create a more pedestrian-friendly area, continuous street frontage should be established where possible.

Parking should be oriented towards the rear of the building, either underground or wrapped garages.

Street amenities such as Washington globe lights and street banners could help maintain the corridor's existing character.



## Phase One of the Central 14th Street Plan

The Central 14th Street Retail Action Strategy is an assessment of the corridor's (Park Road to Taylor Street) retail potential. It examines ways to strengthen the corridor's retail base at the local scale, to promote a vibrant commercial district with a broad range of retail businesses in all neighborhoods, and to create expanded opportunities for small and local retailers.

The outcome of these meetings was a Workplan for Action with a number of high impact strategies for implementation through 2010, including a Washington D.C. Economic Partnership Neighborhood Profile Sheet for 14th Street/Twoll North. Neighborhood profile sheets provide economic and demographic data used to attract retailers to commercial areas and neighborhoods.

## Public Meetings

### 14th Street Revitalization Strategy Meeting One

**Meeting Date and Time:** October 20, 2010 6:30 - 8:00pm

**Location:** Fowell Elementary School, 1350 Upshur St. NW 20011

**Purpose:** Kick off meeting to introduce the plan's purpose, planning process, and strategic focus on the corridor's three commercial nodes from Spring to Longfellow. A breakout visioning exercise followed where attendees were asked questions regarding their likes, concerns, and future aspirations of the 14th Street corridor.

### 14th Street Revitalization Strategy Meeting Two

**Meeting Date and Time:** November 17, 2010 6:30 - 8:00pm

**Location:** Kingsbury School, 5000 14th St. NW 20011

**Purpose:** A presentation was given on the District's vision and how it relates to the planning process for 14th Street. Attendees were also provided an overview of the consultant produced existing conditions and shared an overview of how the results of the first public meeting, first business meeting and second Advisory Committee meeting relate to the findings. A draft Vision Statement was unveiled open for meeting participants to provide comments. Break-out sessions followed regarding economic development at each retail node (Spring to Shepherd, Webster to Decatur, Jefferson to Longfellow) as well transit and transportation in response to the existing conditions report.

### 14th Street Revitalization Strategy Meeting Three

**Meeting Date and Time:** January 19, 2011 6:30 - 8:30pm

**Location:** Kingsbury School, 5000 14th St. NW 20011

**Purpose:** Consultants presented the Plan's market analysis, niche market analysis, and site development opportunities. An overview of related goals and strategies to help revitalize the corridor's commercial nodes were also presented. Additionally, an overview of potential public realm improvements along the study corridor were also discussed. OP provided an opportunity for meeting participants to comment these goals and strategies. Attendees were given six dots and asked to place three blue dots on any of the goals/strategies/recommendations they most agreed with and yellow dots next to those they thought needed more refinement.



#### **14th Street Revitalization Strategy Meeting**

**Meeting Date and Time:** March 10, 2011 6:30 - 8:30pm

**Location:** West Education Campus, 1338 Farragut St. NW 20011

**Purpose:** The first 30 minutes were dedicated to an open house where residents could view and contemplate the conceptual renderings showing what could be at the three commercial nodes. Consultant Otto Condon continued the presentation describing the public realm goals for each of the commercial nodes and how the conceptual renderings/recommendations help to achieve them while supporting economic development. In the breakout sessions, the public was given an opportunity to offer direct feedback to the Office of Planning facilitators on the proposed recommendations and conceptual renderings for further refinement.

#### **14th Street Corridor Vision and Revitalization Strategy Final Public Meeting**

**Meeting Date and Time:** May 21, 2011 10:00am - 1:00pm

**Location:** Powell Elementary School, 1350 Upshur St. NW 20011

**Purpose:** The final meeting was an open house format allowing for participants to review the input that OP and the consultants heard from the public, business community and the advisory committee before reaching through the final draft goals and recommendations. As an open house there was no formal presentation, but participants were given five dots to place next to those recommendations they thought should be priorities. This public prioritization will be referred to when the 14th St. Revitalization Strategy Taskforce is created within 4 months of Council passing the Plan. The Taskforce, in cooperation with relevant DC agencies, will be tasked with implementing those prioritized recommendations.

## **Business Meetings**

#### **Street Revitalization Strategy Business Engagement Meeting One**

**Meeting Date and Time:** Tuesday, October 26, 2010 - 10:00am - 11:30am

**Location:** WMATA Busbarb Small Community Room - 4729 14th St. NW 20011

**Purpose:** Kick-off meeting to introduce the plan's purpose and OP's strategic focus on the corridor's three commercial areas. A brief question and answer period was followed by a breakout visioning exercise, where attendants were asked questions regarding their likes, concerns, and future aspirations of the 14th Street corridor.

#### **14th Street Revitalization Strategy Business Meeting Two**

**Meeting Date and Time:** Tuesday, November 30, 2010 - 10:00am - 11:30am

**Location:** WMATA Busbarb Small Community Room - 4729 14th St. NW 20011

**Purpose:** OP presented information gathered from the past two public meetings regarding public perception of the businesses and the results of the business survey OP conducted across the three commercial nodes. OP consultants, Partners in Economic Solutions (PES) shared their preliminary market analysis results. Dialogue among business owners, OP and PES began with the obvious concern of Wal-Mart coming to the neighborhood.

OP spent time explaining the importance of this planning process in devising comprehensive and collaborative recommendations that will address both the issues of assisting existing businesses and attracting new retail.



#### **14th Street Revitalization Strategy Business Meeting Three**

**Meeting Date and Time:** Tuesday, January 25, 2011 – 10:00am – 11:30am

**Location:** WMATA Busbar Small Community Room – 4729 14th St. NW 20011

**Purpose:** The Office of Planning presented the inputs gathered at the public and business meetings before presenting the draft goals and recommendations that will directly support the businesses along 14th Street. This was followed by in depth discussion of the intended impact of each of the recommendations and how they should be implemented.

#### **14th Street Revitalization Strategy Business Meeting Porth**

**Meeting Date and Time:** Tuesday, April 12, 2011 – 10:00am – 1:00pm

**Location:** WMATA Busbar Small Community Room – 4729 14th St. NW 20011

**Purpose:** This was the first of two opportunities for businesses to learn about District programs and make their business, safety and other concerns known to the Department of Small and Local Business Development (DSLBD), the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs (DCRA), the Deputy Mayors Office for Planning and Economic Development (DMPED) and the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) for current and future coordination. Agency representative presented their relevant programs and resources and business owners had opportunity to discuss one-on-one about how programs were implemented and eligibility requirements.

#### **14th Street Revitalization Strategy Final Business Meeting**

**Meeting Date and Time:** Tuesday, April 26, 2011 – 10:00am – 1:00pm

**Location:** WMATA Busbar Small Community Room – 4729 14th St. NW 20011

**Purpose:** This was the second of two opportunities for businesses to learn about District programs and make their business, safety and other concerns known to the Department of Transportation (DDOT), Department of Public Works (DPW), Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) and DC Commission of Arts and Humanities (DCCAH) for current and future coordination. Agency representative presented their relevant programs and resources and business owners had opportunity to discuss one-on-one about how programs were implemented and eligibility requirements.