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Members of the Zoning Commission, ANC, and DC Council:

I am writing in support for the proposed development of the Dance Loft PUD, Case No 21-18. By approving the requested PUD—particularly allowing it the MU-5A zone—the ANC and the Zoning Board will take an important step towards providing the deeply needed additional affordable housing to our neighborhood, Ward 4, and our City. After all, “without increased housing, the imbalance between supply and demand will drive up housing prices in a way that creates challenges for many residents, particularly low-income residents.”¹

I believe that, by approving the planned unit development (“PUD”), the Dance Loft Project (the “Dance Loft” or the “Project”) will offer a “commendable number of meaningful public benefits”² to our community by (a) providing affordable housing and (b) supporting the development and growth of an arts program. I will briefly discuss each in turn:

Affordable Housing.

The Project would develop approximately 101 additional units of housing in a neighborhood that has barely had any additional new housing (let alone new affordable housing) in the past ten years.³ Of particular importance is the PUD’s MU-5A zoning designation, which would allow the Project to sustain two-thirds of its units to be affordable at 30, 50, and 60% MFI. In addition, 24% of the units would be three-bedroom or family-sized units. As you likely know, apartment units for families—i.e., three-bedrooms—are particularly hard to find in the District.

Increased availability of affordable housing is consistent with the City’s goals [for 36,000 new residential units by 2025 \(of which 12,000 would need to be affordable\) in order to keep up with housing demand.](#)⁴ This Project would only address 5% of what our “Rock Creek East

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¹ Memorandum from Stephen J. Modfin and Jennifer Steingasser to the District of Columbia Zoning Commission, dated December 6, 2021, titled “Preliminary Report for Zoning Commission Case No. 21-18, Consolidated Planned Unit Development and Related Map Amendment from MU-3A to MU-5A at 4608-4618 14th Street, NW, Square 2704, Lots 64, 815, 819, 821, 823, 828 and 830-833

² District of Columbia Municipal Regulations, Subtitle X § 300.1

³ SIS: Tab A (Part 2, Statement in Support), https://app.dcoz.dc.gov/CaseReport/CaseReportPage.aspx?case_id=21-18 “4608-4618 14th Street, NW Application for Review and Approval of a Consolidated Planned Unit Development and Zoning Map Amendment” dated October 26, 2021, pages 4 (“Nearby Development”), 5 (“Nearby Housing Characteristics”), and 18 (“Neighbor Opposition to the Construction of New Housing Impedes Housing Equity and other forms of Equity”).

⁴ “Housing Equity Report: Creating Goals for Areas of Our City,” dated October 2019, last viewed 3-8-22 https://housing.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/housingdc/page_content/attachments/Housing%20Equity%20Report%2010-15-19.pdf

Planning Area” needs in terms of new housing⁵, but it is important that the ANC and the Zoning Commission (and all of us, as neighbors and as a community) remember that each step matters. Indeed, it is notable that much of any affordable housing that has been allowed in our area has been focused in Brightwood, Petworth, and along Georgia Avenue with very little (if any, to my knowledge) being developed in the Sixteenth Street Heights neighborhood. As the Mayor’s Equity Report correctly notes: “It’s not fair to place all of the affordable units in one part of the city because the wealthiest neighborhoods don’t want it. To thrive, neighborhoods need to be mixed-income.”⁶

Arts Program.

The Dance Loft on 14th has been in the Sixteenth Street neighborhood since 2015. They provide a center for children and adults to take dance classes, for dancers to perform, and for the public to come together in appreciation of the performing arts.⁷ The space is in dire need of rehabilitation where the current structure is simply not sustainable for long-term operations. The Project will offer the opportunity to not only revitalize the space’s existing use, but to modernize and truly serve as an anchor for the arts community and the neighborhood.

The Dance Loft has already evidenced a strong commitment to the neighborhood and a desire to see Sixteenth Street Heights continue to thrive. By supporting the PUD, then the ANC and Zoning Board will be supporting and helping secure the future for a locally-owned and woman-owned arts organization. The Dance Loft’s future ambitions, as a retail and arts anchor that further invigorates the neighborhood, are exactly the kind of project that the Comprehensive Plan envisions when it articulates the policy goal to, “[s]trengthen opportunities for existing and new small businesses along the Central 14th Street corridor and enhance their marketing and advertising to increase neighborhood patronage.”⁸

The Dance Loft already provides a great and special value to the neighborhood, the community, and City as a whole. By supporting the requested PUD, I believe the redeveloped arts program (and commercial spaces) will encourage modern and important retail development, but, more importantly, provide children and adults with a genuinely unique and special space to appreciate and learn about ballet, dance, and the arts.

Public Benefits.

The Comprehensive Plan notes that, “[a]s the District grows and changes, it must do so in a way that encourages choice, not displacement, and builds the capacity of vulnerable, marginalized, and low-income communities to fully and substantively participate in decision-making processes and share in the benefits of growth, while not unduly bearing its negative impacts.”⁹ The Zoning Code requires that the proposed PUD “[r]esults in a project superior to

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⁵ Id at 5 (Figure 2 (2025 Dedicated Affordable Housing Production Goals) identifies 1,500 new units needed for Rock Creek East, while the Project would produce approximately 66 units)

⁶ Id. at 3.

⁷ <https://www.danceloft14.org/about> (last visited on 3-8-22)

⁸ Comprehensive Plan Update, “Rock Creek East Area Element,” 2217.6

⁹ Comprehensive Plan Update, “Citywide Elements,” 213.7

what would result from the matter-of-right standards; [o]ffers a commendable number or quality of meaningful public benefits; and [p]rotects and advances the public health, safety, welfare, and convenience and is not inconsistent with the Comprehensive Plan.”¹⁰ I believe that this Project’s requested PUD is consistent with both the Comprehensive Plan and the Zoning Code. It provides affordable housing at a scale that could not be achieved under the MU-3A or MU-4A designations, it does not displace any residents, and it would allow an arts organization to flourish and provide a special and unique service and benefit to the community. We will all be better for it.

Abutting neighbors are, understandably, upset about potential disturbances to their block and changes to the area. There will be disruption to the abutting neighbors during construction and the Project will, indeed, look taller than some of the other buildings in the area. But (a) the construction would be temporary and we all go through it to some degree or another when there is a new project in the District (including rehabbed houses); and (b) **the Comprehensive Plan specifically contemplates and encourages these density changes in order to accommodate increased housing and revitalization.**

Where people live and can afford to live matter. Sixteenth Street Heights provides its residents green spaces, parks, playgrounds, pools, access to public transit, walkability, and opportunity. This is why I bought my house here. This is why I firmly believe it is our duty, as residents, neighbors, and elected officials, to open up our doors and welcome this Project. I urge the ANC and Zoning Board to approve the PUD and allow this Project to proceed.

Thank you,

/s/

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¹⁰ District of Columbia Municipal Regulations, Subtitle X § 300.1