

TESTIMONY OF MEREDITH GARDNER  
MEMBER FRIENDS OF 14th STREET

ZONING COMMISSION of THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
DANCE LOFT LLC PUD APPLICATION ZC 21-18

May 5, 2022 – 4PM

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony here today. My name is Meredith Gardner and I am a 30-year resident of Washington DC, 16 of those years in 16<sup>th</sup> Street Heights at 1417 Buchanan Street NW, directly abutting the PUD in question. I live here with my nine-year-old son. I am testifying today to request that you oppose the Dance Loft Application for a PUD and related Map Amendment to upzone the site from an MU-3A to an MU-5A Zone.

For all the years I have lived on Buchanan Street I have longed for the property behind my house to be developed; the current structure is unsightly at best. I was both excited and supportive of the Heleos/Dance Loft development until I learned of the height, density and scale proposed for this project.

The proposed plan is for the building to encompass the entirety of the alley space of the block, to be built two stories higher than the current zoning allows (towering over my house and those around me), and encroaching upon the already narrow alley to within 10 feet of my property line.

From the first meetings with the developer where they shared their plan and vision for this development, I let them know I could not and would not support their proposal at its current size. We have had meeting after meeting with Heleos where this opinion has been voiced, and where all requests for compromise were met with the statement that essentially any compromise on scale would negatively impact the profitability of their concept, which is not a valid reason to be granted a PUD.

If Heleos/ Dance Loft are able to encroach upon the alley to decrease the width to 10 feet, this becomes a safety issue in that larger emergency vehicles could not traverse the alley. It also impacts trash and recycle removal as it would be impossible for both garbage trucks and trash cans to be in the alley at the same time.

Another concern, which has been readily dismissed by the developer, is the impact on street parking that adding 101 apartment units will have. Most of us are not fortunate enough to have off street parking (and those that do on the 1400 block of Buchanan will lose that ability if the alley is narrowed to 10 feet). Street parking is already scarce on my block of Buchanan Street. It was even more scarce when the bus barn, currently closed for renovations itself, was up and running, and parking remains hard to find when the Ethiopian Church is having services. Currently, about half the time I food shop I have to double park outside my house to unload groceries because there is no parking on my block. The developer insists that most of their tenants will not have cars and thus providing 40 parking spaces will be sufficient. This is wishful thinking at best; the reality is street parking in our neighborhood cannot support parking

for the number of units the developer hopes to build by getting an exemption to the current zoning.

Heleos/Dance Loft has crafted an impressive public relations campaign to sell this property to District residents as much needed affordable housing and arts space. Those that oppose the development are branded as anti-affordable housing and NIMBY's. This is simply not true. Their renderings of the proposed structure do not accurately represent the size and scale of the proposed development and streets around it. In one particular visual, Buchanan Street was shown as the width of a four-lane highway. It seems that even Heleos/Dance Loft know that if they show accurate renderings to scale then their proposal may not seem quite so enticing.

I implore you to heed my concerns and those of my neighbors. There are many issues with the proposed Heleos/Dance Loft project of which I have only mentioned a few. Please deny the Application for PUD and related Map Amendment as presented, so that the developer will finally be compelled to engage in serious discussions about rightsizing this project for the neighborhood. All we want is development of the interior alley portion within the constraints of the current zoning.

I appreciate your time and attention to this matter. Thank you.

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