

Testimony of Jason Kelleher
16th St Heights Resident at 4704 15th St NW, Washington, DC 20011

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

May 5, 2022 – 4PM

My name is Jason Kelleher, and I would like to thank Chairperson Hood and the Zoning Commission for considering this testimony. I am a 15-year resident of the 16th St. Heights Neighborhood, and I respectfully request that the Zoning Commission reject the Dance Loft Application for a PUD and rezoning the site to an MU-5A until the project is right-sized for the neighborhood.

My family and I live a block from the proposed development. In electing to move to 16th St. Heights, we—like many—did so because of its diversity, its 100-year-old family homes, and its welcoming community. Those are still characteristics we cherish today, and we are proud to have raised our son here. I—and most of my neighbors—support more affordable housing in the neighborhood and believe more diversity benefits us. However, I believe this needs to be undertaken at a size and scale that retains the character of the neighborhood. The Dance Loft PUD does not.

My specific reasons for objecting are:

1. The scale and height of the proposed structure is far too great, soaring to 75+ feet plus 6.5 feet of rooftop enclosures as I understand. The structure will dwarf the homes around it, blocking natural light and significantly changing the character of the neighborhood. The rear of most of the row homes that would back up to the proposed development are less than 25' in height, as a point of comparison.
2. Comparable developments in the city have concentrated their density on main thoroughfares (for example, 14th St.) and alleys behind the structures provide a divide between the larger buildings and adjacent smaller homes. The Dance Loft PUD, however, will project back 295' from 14th Street, where its height will dwarf the row homes along Crittenden, 15th, and

Buchanan. A 10' alley gap is not sufficient and affected neighbors will literally be staring at a brick wall.

3. The alleys will become thoroughfares for parking access and deliveries for a 101-unit building. Two-way, 10' wide allies will rapidly become problematic—they were not built for that volume of traffic.
4. A building of this size is required per code to have 55 parking spaces. The developer is proposing 40. Parking—which was a consideration for many of us in buying homes in this neighborhood—has already become quite tight, and the proposed new building would exacerbate the problem significantly.
5. The plan does not address the fact that the WMATA Bus Barn, when completed, will return significant additional traffic and parking strain. The Bus Barn was closed for renovation when the cursory traffic study for the PUD was conducted.
6. While our commercial corridor is small, it is lively and used frequently by neighbors. Several small business owners would lose their livelihoods if the proposed project were to move forward and have formed a party to also oppose this PUD.

I have no objections to affordable housing in 16th St Heights, but the Dance Loft PUD is **too large** and will have a significant negative impact. The *2012 Central 14th St Vision Plan and Revitalization Strategy* called for redeveloping this location to include 2-3 floors of residential space, including affordable housing (page 34). I—and many of us—supported that scale. The same plan clearly expressed concern for minimizing the impact. I quote: “The surrounding residential uses between Crittenden and Buchanan consist of single-family homes... in all cases, height and density should front on 14th Street and step back away from existing residential neighborhoods” (page 35). The Comprehensive Plan makes a similar point “Development on these sites should be in keeping with the scale of the surrounding community...[and] address parking and traffic issues.” Likewise, Policy RCE-1.1.2 notes new developments should “respect the scale and densities of adjacent properties.” The Dance Loft Ventures PUD application does **not** address these concerns satisfactorily.

I understand there is a lot of emotion and money invested in this, but achieving neighborhood buy-in would seem to be critical. I do not feel like community concerns have been heard or addressed. Most recently, for example, Heleos indicated they did not think a community-built model—which was designed by an architect using the applicant’s data—was accurate. I diplomatically proposed that Heleos develop a model that they felt was accurate—my request was immediately rejected. While the applicant has secured a number of letters of support, a heat map would quickly show the overwhelming majority are not from those who live in our community or even the District, in many cases.

In closing, I respectfully urge the members of the Zoning Commission to reject the proposed modifications to existing zoning regulations and require a significant downscaling of this project or redesign. There are options available that would allow the space to be redeveloped without overwhelming the established surrounding community. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely
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