

Chairperson Hood and members of the Zoning Commission:

We live at 1518 Buchanan Street, one block from the proposed development. We support affordable housing in our neighborhood and seek to promote the arts in DC. We firmly oppose the Dance Loft Ventures LLC development PUD, Case 21-18, that seeks a map amendment, a request to upzone from MU-3A to MU-5A, and to add additional density for the following reasons:

1. The scale and height of the proposed structure are far too great for the neighborhood. 75 feet plus 6.5 feet of rooftop is almost double the existing MU-3A height limit of 40 feet. The structure will dwarf the 33 homes that border the property, blocking natural light and eliminating privacy for both rowhouse residents and future residents of the development. This lot is squeezed into the interior of block so tightly the applicant needs nearly a 300-foot setback from 14th street, the only frontage of the building. Our research reflects no other lots like this in all of DC. Further, the matter-of-right size for MU-3A is overbearing as it is, since it is surrounded on three sides by RF-1 zoned row houses.

Further, the zoning regulations state a PUD should not result in more than a 20% increase in density. The applicant's proposal is far above that and creates a building that is large even compared to the other multi-unit buildings on 14th street. Those buildings are not squeezed into blocks of row houses, but have proper set-backs.

2. The alleys are far too narrow to handle traffic that will accompany such a large building. The proposed development will increase risks to pedestrian and driver safety. The surrounding alleys all reach the street through blind approaches, with row house walls immediately bordering. The neighborhood already has safety issues with vehicles cutting through current alleys while children play. Nothing the applicant has proposed would mitigate this increased safety hazard. We moved to Buchanan Street for a safe neighborhood to raise our new family. The lack of safety in alleys is a major concern for our family, and we believe the intention to have the main entrance to the development via a 10-foot-wide alley through a residential block is a recipe for disaster.

3. The majority of support for this development comes from outside the neighborhood, and even from outside the District. While the interests of the city as a whole are to be considered in the PUD process, the primary residents facing the benefits and detriments are the people in the immediate neighborhood. The Comprehensive plan states in IM-1.1.8 that the "[s]ubstantial part of the amenities should benefit the neighboring community." The immediate community benefits greatly from the six current small businesses. But the applicant won't even commit to retaining those businesses. The neighborhood would simply not gain anything from this over matter-of-right development. The city would gain affordable housing, but this can only be considered an indirect benefit/amenity in the PUD process.

We live a block and a half from the development. While we will be impacted by vehicles and new residents in the neighborhood, even we will not be impacted by this behemoth of a building like the immediately surrounding block. The large number of letters in support of this PUD come from people outside the immediate neighborhood. For them, there is no trade-off to be made because they won't experience any of the negative effects of the proposed development; they likely won't experience any effects at all. We urge you to review the sources of letters of support and to give much less deference to letters from individuals or groups whose quiet enjoyment of their home will not be destroyed by a new five-story building bordering their property.

4. It is of concern to us that the six small, locally owned businesses currently on the property will be displaced. The lot is currently zoned for mixed commercial and residential use, and we fail to see how reducing the number of businesses from six to three as proposed provides any kind of benefit to the surrounding community. Not only will those businesses be forced to move during construction, if they are able to find new locations in new neighborhoods, it is highly unlikely they will ever return to our small but vibrant commercial corridor.

5. Councilmember Lewis-George claimed recently that this and one other site would nearly half of all the affordable housing units to reach the goal for Ward 4. We dispute the notion that it is a positive point to consolidate all of this affordable housing into one oversized development as opposed to offering it throughout Ward 4.

6. The applicant cannot ensure financing for this project. This entire project relies not only on public subsidies for some of the units, but also for the Dance Loft as a business. The applicant is counting on an unending stream of subsidies from the city to make the 66 affordable units and the art space financially feasible. This is not something the applicant can control into the future and seems highly risky on which to base the operation of a successful development.

Please consider that this neighborhood is not a wealthy demographic trying to protect a privileged space from others who'd like to live here. We moved here precisely because it's a moderately dense, diverse, mixed-use neighborhood with access to public transportation. We we'd like our daughters to grow up in this neighborhood. This development is unfair to those living on its block and sets a horrible precedent of subverting zoning rules because a developer finds a way to attract enough voices from outside the affected area under the misleading pretenses of providing successful affordable housing and space for the arts. Please don't let these voices smother those in the immediate blocks that should be central to the PUD negotiation process.

We request that you deny this PUD request.

Thank you,
Lauren Becker and James Wagner
1518 Buchanan St, NW 20011