

5 May 2022

DC Zoning Commission  
441 4th Street, NW, Suite 200S,  
Washington, DC 20001

Case No. 21-18

Dear Zoning Commissioners:

My name is Samir Bitar. I am writing to you today as a dancer and choreographer, a leader of arts and culture organizations, and a District homeowner. I am writing specifically in support of the professional abilities and personal commitment of Dance Loft's Executive Director Diana Movius. There has been a singular voice in the community that has unfortunately sought to block the new Dance Loft 14 dance center by assailing Diana's character and commitment to the field of dance. I'd like to counter that voice.

Dance in America is difficult. As an ephemeral art form, dance doesn't fit as well into our economy's product-driven model. Unlike painters, film makers, musicians, writers, and poets who produce tangible works of art that can be stored and sold, dancers make impermanent works of art, which aren't as easily packaged for sell. And when they are, in the form of DVDs or digital files, the market for such "products" is exceedingly small. Given these pressures on the art form of dance, and on its practitioners, many - if not MOST dancers in America - must support their creative work with other forms of income. I worked at Pfizer pharmaceutical for years while first studying at Cunningham school in New York and then making dances there. In DC, I worked at the Smithsonian to both ensure a retirement pension, as well as to fund the creation of dances. Someone has critiqued Diana's commitment to dance, by calling out her simultaneous work in environmental policy while standing up and running Dance Loft 14. I would think it unfair to penalize dancers as "non-Committal to the art form" for having to diversify their income streams through side ventures.

On the topic of Diana as an arts administrator, I cannot speak more highly of her competency and abilities. Having worked with Diana for nearly seven years I can attest to not only her commitment as a choreographer and dancer, but her proven competence as an arts administrator. I witnessed Diana, while working full-time in environmental policy, contribute years of her time and personal finances to establish and maintain Dance Loft 14. Dance Loft provides professional dancers a critical space to both strengthen their technique through classes, AND to create and present new dance works. In 2018, I had a theatrical production in the DC Fringe festival. Dance Loft 14 was the ONLY space that offered below-market space rental— and we looked high and low at no fewer than ten other spaces in the District. Without Diana's skills and steadfast commitment to dance we could not have created and fine-tuned our critically acclaimed, sold-out production.

Finally, I continue to be impressed by Diana's ability to fundraise. I have been an arts administrator for nearly 20 years and have only seen the abilities and successes in fundraising that Diana demonstrates at much larger arts organization, like at the Smithsonian or the Joyce Theater in NY. The enormous success of Diana and her team's fiscal prudence, and fundraising prowess is demonstrated by her ability to galvanize a community of funders to join her in her vision of buying a space in ward 4 and developing the kind of world-class, professional dance center that strengthens the District's position as an epicenter of art in the Nation.

Since losing the **American Dance Institute** in Rockville in 2015 to upstate New York, the DMV community has needed a replacement space of its kind. Diana's vision is helping to reestablish such a center for dance in the District. I congratulate and laud Diana and her team for their vision and hard work and urge the Zoning Commission to vote in favor of this important project.



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