

**TESTIMONY OF KATHERINE MILIKIN & PETER BOUMA
MEMBER FRIENDS OF 14th STREET**

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

May 5, 2022 – 4PM

Good Evening Chairperson Hood and members of the Zoning Commission and staff. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

We moved to 16th Street Heights in 2002 and raised two children in a diverse community of neighbors that understands the value of connecting among each other. Our neighbors helped raise our children; they were in and out of their houses, up and down their stoops for Halloween, on the basketball courts, and playing laser tag in the alleys. In these 20 years, we have waited for good and thoughtful development to occur behind our home while being good customers to all of the businesses. Chef Mo of Highlands always asks about my son.

We will say that the former owners of Value Furniture cared little about their property and its maintenance or their engagement with surrounding neighbors.

(While our view of the barbed-wire fencing is not pretty, we have beautiful

sunrises and light throughout the day.) We hoped for new neighbors that would treat their community more thoughtfully.

This past year has been an effort in futility in talking with the new owners. The applicant's current success is in dividing a neighborhood that values the same thing—a community with older residents, new families, couples, singles, as well as the accompanying ethnic and economic diversity. What supporters of the project value, so do we. The applicant's outreach and marketing has focused on gathering support rather than working through the objections of abutting neighbors. The applicant's public relations caricature of opposition as anti-affordable housing and NIMBYs has overshadowed the legitimate concerns of neighbors who believe that this overreach does not set new and current residents up for success.

For example, there are few amenities to support these new residents (e.g. grocery stores, pharmacies, parking) in the neighborhood. As you know, the 2012 Small Area Plan, noting the neighborhood's prominent charm, advocated for development to be contextually sensitive and to attract a medium scale grocery anchor to support existing businesses and spur increased foot traffic from

neighbors west of the bus barn. While the applicant's proposal may not violate the letter of the plan, it does not align with the spirit of it. Infill in this area is not contextually sensitive to the current neighbors. The applicant did not take into account its immediate surroundings, **providing a balance of community values and assets**. If they had, our community would not be divided against itself. I would not have to hear my neighbors and friends who have known me for years blithely discard our opposition, describing that opposition as uncivil or worse, calling me and my neighbors liars.

The Small Area Plan listed parking as a concern for neighbors as well as businesses and should be considered as part of the redevelopment process. It has been a concern of abutting neighbors from the first conversation. The applicant and submitted traffic consultants' report do not take into consideration the simultaneous redevelopment of the bus barn that will increase the number of cars in a congested area, nor street cleaning on Mondays and Tuesdays, nor the state of parking on Sundays. We ask you to find parking in the neighborhood on any Sunday morning. The study is flawed from the outset. And, until last Thursday, I did not know from the plans that the theater would seat 150 to 200

people. I am sure their goal is to have many events to meet the goal of increased accessibility for the arts.

One of the two concessions the applicant made was to include 20 spaces designated for residents. (The other was to provide for 2 additional business to support what commercial activity we might lose.) Likely, new residents will park on the streets, like most of us. In terms of security for those families and residents who will park in the neighborhood, they will park away from their homes as we do when coming back after 9pm. We have an 18YO daughter who parks blocks away after dark due to a lack of parking on our own block; we stay up to ensure she gets home safely. These are real concerns and not mere inconveniences. As to our current backyard, it is our greenspace with trees and flowers. We would lose considerably to build a car-pad.

If the proposal moves forward, new residents will need better transportation options for their trips to grocery stores, physicians, or pharmacies to be successful. For example, the 52 + 54 bus lines are packed at peak times. WMATA is considering not reinstating the S1 on 16th Street. Those S buses are full always. The Small Area Plan advocated for a grocery store in the current space with **two**

or three floors of residential units above it. In that scenario, residents of affordable housing as well as neighbors would have easy access to the most important thing—food.

The Small Area Plan also identified multiple parcels to support the need for increased affordable housing. That plan had considerable neighborhood; it certainly had ours. This development will concentrate that increase into one parcel. In the current proposal, the applicant plans to build 101 units, an increase from its original 99 units. After hearing concerns from neighbors about the height, scale, and density, the applicant ignored those concerns and answered with an increased number and no real explanation. Now, the applicant has offered that 101 units is the threshold for its viability. The number of market rate apartments has not been adjusted to address our concerns. In fact, last week, they declined to commit to keeping the current 67 affordable rate apartments if asked to reduce the total number of units. When faced with concerns from neighbors, the applicant has chosen to expand/increase. In a year of presentations and limited conversations, we gained 20 parking spaces, 2 additional businesses, and 2 new units. There has been no concession or compromise on height, scale, or density.

We are not architects nor urban planners. We live and work in this city and we are open to variations of development that allow for compromise. This opportunity is not a binary choice. It is not zero sum. It is BOTH/AND.

With approval from elected officials and the Zoning Commission, this development would supply half of Ward 4's affordable housing units in the pipeline. Abutting neighbors will carry most of that burden. My neighbors living away from site and supportive, while well-intentioned, likely wouldn't swap properties with us. In many ways and in this instance, we have squandered the opportunity to develop this parcel in ways that benefit its current residents and that provide the important amenities new residents need to live and work in this amazing city.

We hope you will consider the spirit of the Small Area Plan as useful to this discussion and reject the Applicant's current proposal.

Respectfully,

Katherine Milikin and Peter Bouma

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