

**BEFORE THE ZONING COMMISSION  
of the DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

**TESTIMONY OF JULIO FERNANDEZ**

**CASE NO. 21-18 (DANCE LOFT VENTURES, LLC)**

**Application for a Consolidated PUD and Related Map Amendment**

**@ Square 2704, Lots 64, 815, 819, 821, 823, 828, and 830-833**

**THURSDAY, MAY 12, 2022**

Good evening, Chairman Hood and Members of the Commission.

My name is Julio Fernandez and I have lived on the 1400 block of Buchanan St, NW for 16 years. I have lived in DC for 22 years. I am a member of the Hispanic/Latino community here in DC and am testifying this afternoon in opposition of Case No. 21-18. Specifically, I am testifying about letters of support filed on the record of this case because it is important to accurately characterize those letters and provide context when those letters are compared to the seemingly small number of letters of opposition.

As of May 5<sup>th</sup>, there have been approximately 627 letters in support of this project. In contrast, as of the same date, there have been approximately 52 opposition letters filed. The vast majority of letters of support are from individuals that do not live in the immediate area surrounding this project and thus, are not representative of people that will be *negatively directly* impacted by this project. In its Pre-Hearing

Statement, the Applicant asserts that “the Commission may consider the interests of those who will benefit from the Project in addition to the more parochial interests of those who reside closest to the Project.” While this is true, it is important to highlight that these more “parochial” interests should not be disregarded or diminished in favor of supporters that span the boundaries of the District of Columbia, the mid-Atlantic and other jurisdictions such as Florida, Massachusetts, and California.

As previously noted, as of May 5<sup>th</sup>, there have been approximately 627 letters in support of this project. The vast majority of those letters are from individuals that reside far away from the immediate area that will be impacted by this project. These letters of support span the District of Columbia – letters that come from across Ward 4 and from other locations such as Tenleytown, Mt. Pleasant, Kalorama, Crestwood, and Embassy Row to name just a few. But these letters of support also come from individuals from North Carolina, Maryland, Virginia, Michigan, Pennsylvania, California, Florida, and New York. In its Pre-Hearing Statement, the Applicant states that individuals “further afield but in the District of Columbia, and some surrounding states” *may* [emphasis added] travel significant distances to attend, teach, and/or perform at the project site. The Applicant also writes that “some non-District residents supporting affordable housing *might* [emphasis added] want to become District of Columbia residents, and *perhaps* [emphasis added] would be District residents if the District had a greater supply of affordable housing choices.” This may be true, but I urge the Commission to weigh such possibilities of what may happen against the very tangible and certain negative impact of this project on current residents that live in this neighborhood, especially those that abut the project site or live near it.

The Commission should not give greater weight to letters of support from Tenleytown, Kalorama, Northampton, MA or Estero, FL based on the mere possibility that individuals from these locations may be patrons of the Dance Loft and might move to reside in this building. The Applicant stresses the key role that the arts play for the District of Columbia, drawing “visitors, students, performers, teachers and others from surrounding jurisdictions into the District,” and by extension inferring that when completed, this project will serve as a catalyst to help drive the District’s economy. It is true that the arts play a vital role in the fiber of our city, and I have been an avid supporter of the arts for many years. However, Applicant’s statements in this regard are aspirational and I urge the Commission to see them as such.

Many of the letters of support filed on the record come from residents in other areas of the city. They also come from neighbors that live close to the project site itself – approximately 6 letters from residents that report to live on Square 2704. In contrast, approximately 16 letters of opposition have been filed from residents that report to live in the same area. This number goes up by approximately 19 letters of opposition when you include the blocks immediately to the north, west, and south of Square 2704. Many of our elderly neighbors that live in the immediate area who also oppose this project are not able to voice that opposition in a digital manner. The painful reality is that residents in the immediate area of this project site are the ones that will be *negatively directly* impacted if Applicant’s PUD application is approved as it currently stands.

The simple truth is that District residents far from this project site are **not** the ones that will suffer the development’s negative impacts described in more detail by my neighbors.

I urge the Commission to appropriately weigh letters of support filed on the record of this proceeding against letters of opposition submitted by neighbors that live in the immediate area who are the ones that will be *negatively directly* impacted – on a daily basis – if this project is approved as submitted. Lastly, please understand that while we fully support affordable housing and the arts, we oppose this project based solely on its current size and scale.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony today and welcome any questions you may have.