

May 2, 2022

Mr. Anthony Hood
Chairman
Zoning Commission of the District of Columbia
441 4th Street, NW, Suite 210S
Washington, DC 20001

RE: **Support** for Z.C. Case No. 21-18 (Dance Loft Ventures, LLC – Application for a Consolidated PUD and Map Amendment @ Square 2704, Lots 64, 815, 819, 821, 823, 828, and 830-833)

Dear Chairman Hood and Commissioners:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. Please accept these comments on behalf of the Coalition for Smarter Growth, the leading non-profit organization in the D.C. region advocating for walkable, bikeable, inclusive, transit-oriented communities as the most sustainable and equitable way for the DC region to grow and provide opportunities for all.

We wish to express our strong support for Zoning Case No. 21-18. This is an outstanding project in all respects. The proposal uses a Planned Unit Development to carefully redevelop the site to add 101 mixed income apartments, retain an enhanced community performing arts venue, and keep main street retail spaces fronting 14th Street NW in the 16th Street Heights neighborhood of Ward 4. The project, in terms of scale and use, is supported by the small area plan, the Future Land Use Map and the Comprehensive Plan. Most importantly, the proposal stands out for its contribution to addressing the affordable housing and racial equity goals of the Comprehensive Plan, offering deeply affordable rental homes, and family-sized rental homes for low income families. These impressive contributions will largely benefit people of color, fulfilling the Comp Plan's demand that all zoning actions be viewed through a racial equity lens.

This project is a standout in many ways, adding the following:

- retains and enhances a community performing arts venue, preventing displacement
- 66 units total of affordable housing from 30% to 60% MFI
- 22 units of these affordable homes will be deeply affordable housing at 30% MFI, and 22 units at 50% MFI.
- 24 rental 3-bedroom apartments
- 16 of the total 3-bedroom units will be affordable for larger low income renter families
- seeks a LEED Gold environmental rating or higher with Net Zero Energy performance
- offers a large number of affordable homes in a location that is increasingly out of reach for lower income residents, and for DC Black and Latinx families
- the site is well-served by transportation options: it's located on the 50s bus priority corridor and 2 blocks from the 16th Street bus priority corridor, 14th Street bicycle lanes, and on a block with a Bikeshare station.

Transportation

The site directly fronts the 14th Street (50s line) bus priority corridor – one of the major bus lines in the region and city. The site is also a 0.2 mile (4 minute) walk to the 16th Street bus priority corridor, an ever higher ridership bus line (Ss) that will shortly operate on dedicated lanes during rush hour. Focusing more housing along these bus priority corridors allows more people to have access to high quality transit service. The site is highly accessible by bicycle as well, with bike lanes directly serving the site. We commend the developer’s offer to expand the bikeshare docks in front of the building.

Regarding motor vehicle parking, we support the parking relief requested, but note that the project would benefit by lower parking levels, which would be a cost savings. The project’s close proximity to two bus priority corridors should qualify it for a 50% reduction in parking requirements under the current zoning regulations. Zoning case (No. 21-22), which proposes to eliminate parking requirements for affordable housing units also demonstrates that costs of parking supply should not hamper this project. We also want to note the inequity of denying new residents from receiving extremely cheap residential parking permits in a neighborhood where most surrounding rowhouse owners have the option to park vehicles on their property which is accessible by an alley system.

Racial Equity Lens

The primary beneficiaries of this project are likely to be Black and Latinx families who seek to live in Ward 4, including in larger homes for larger families, but earn lower incomes. The project would provide permanently affordable homes for very low- to extremely low-income households earning 30% MFI. Serving households at these income levels is a priority as they correlate to the average DC Black family income, which is below 50% MFI, according to the Comp Plan ([500.7c](#)). We also note that this Commission has repeatedly asked for more affordable housing in PUDs, especially at the 30% MFI level. The surrounding block is occupied by mostly homeowners, many of whom are white. The block’s rowhouses have values averaging \$800,000 in a neighborhood with some of the [highest homeowner profits from home sales](#) in the region. The mixed-income, mixed-use proposal overwhelmingly benefits people of color, and fulfills the Comp Plan’s guidance that all zoning actions be viewed through a racial equity lens.

In addition to the Dance Loft, six businesses owned by people of color will be temporarily or permanently displaced from the site during construction. The impact on the small retail businesses is being mitigated by the Dance Loft partners providing relocation and financial assistance, and potentially enabling businesses to return to the site. While no disruption of the businesses operations is ideal, Dance Loft and the other enterprises faced uncertainty when their building was offered for sale. Dance Loft will relocate temporarily during construction and return to an enhanced space, along with new retail space, and 101, mostly affordable, apartments. The other businesses will be assisted by Dance Loft in their relocation, with the potential to find new space nearby or possibly return to the site after construction. This approach mitigates the burden that these enterprises face. Considering the mitigation offered to counter the burden to Black and Latinx business owners, and the significant affordable housing to be provided, the benefits of the redevelopment are worth the effort.

The Comp Plan recognizes that low income residents, especially Black residents, are at risk of displacement. This is reinforced by a national study on displacement that validates the Comp Plan's emphasis on building permanently affordable housing as a key strategy to preventing displacement and advancing racial equity. The site is adjacent to areas experiencing high levels of displacement of low income residents, according to a report by Institute for Metropolitan Opportunity (see attached: [Gentrification and Economic Decline by Census Tract \(2000-2016\) Map of Washington, DC Region](#)). Adding new, permanently affordable housing at these deep affordability levels, and larger unit sizes will help to prevent displacement and ensure a stable diversity of residents for the neighborhood.

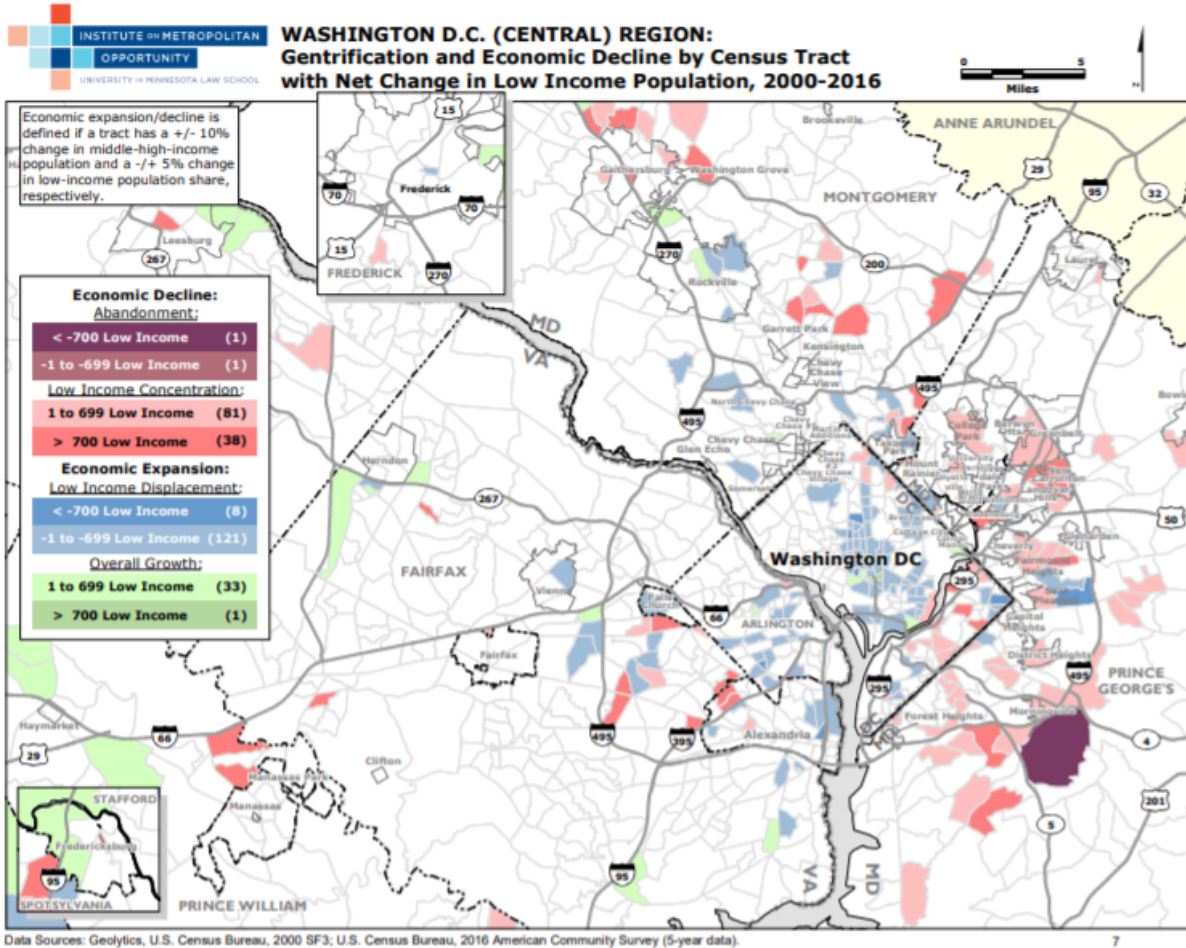
The Dance Loft project, with its significant affordable housing, community, and equity benefits, is exactly the sort of project we have all hoped for to realize the vision of the updated Comp Plan for an inclusive and equitable city. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Cheryl Cort
Policy Director

Attachment: Map of Washington, DC Region, Institute for Metropolitan Opportunity



Source: [Institute for Metropolitan Opportunity, Washington DC Region, American Neighborhood Change in the 21st Century April 2019.](#)

