

ANC2F ARTS Overlay Review Committee Meeting
1401 Q St. NW

July 7, 2009

Notice of these meetings was: 1) given at the public meeting of ANC2F on 6/3/09 and 2) distributed to the ANC2F listserv on 6/3/09, 6/10/09, 6/17/09, 6/23/09 and 6/30/09

These minutes were created by the Arts Overlay Committee for their use. Speaker comments are presented in highly summarized form and do not represent verbatim statements made at Committee meetings. If using these summaries in other contexts, the attribution should be to the ANC2F Arts Overlay Committee minutes of July 7, 2009 and not to individual speakers.

Present

Andrea Doughty
Mary Brown
Ben Harris
Giorgio Furioso
Joe Kerger

Absent

Jim Kane
Linda Welch
Khalid Pitts

Some additional neighbor and business community attendees were:

David Franco, Level 2 Development (View 14) and Owner, Universal Gear
Timothy Paul, Owner, Timothy Paul Carpets & Timothy Paul Bedding + Home
Phyllis Klein, Chair, Zoning Committee, Dupont Circle Citizens Association,
Robin Diener, President DCCA,
Phil Piga, Resident, 15th and P Streets, NW
Martin Chin, Owner, Bang & Olufson, 14th Street

Brief overview by Andrea Doughty:

ANC2F's special ARTS Overlay Review Committee is reviewing the provisions of the ARTS Overlay Zoning District, including the 25% limitation related to restaurants/bars on 14th Street, NW, in order to examine what more the zoning regulations can do to encourage vibrant development of daytime retail and other uses on 14th Street. The committee is interested in hearing from any person or organization that has views on these issues.

Meeting of the ARTS Overlay Review Committee are public and will take place on Tuesday evenings in June and July. Following this period of public consultation and outreach, recommendations will be formulated in August. The ARTS Overlay Review Committee will report its recommendations to ANC2F and the DC Office of Planning by early September 2009.

First Speaker – David Franco, owner of Universal Gear on 14th Street

1. The present economy challenging and Universal Gear's business is consistent with retail nationally which has decreased on average 25%.
2. The downturn in retail nationally will impact the growth on 14th Street and U Street, but more

important factor affecting small business in DC is real estate taxes which have been rising at a high rate, and which he called “outrageous”.

3. 14th and U Streets would benefit from a mix of national and local retail.

4. Ideally, a split between office, retail and restaurants would help strengthen both 14th and U Street.

5. Before new retail moves to 14th Street, they want to understand the risks:

- the greater area
- the momentum and whether it will continue or decline
- what the community and the city are doing to help the area

6. One thing that needs to be done is more effort to “visually brand” the area, such as signage on the lamp posts and more painted cross walks. Mentioned a possible BID application for U Street.

7. Façade restoration is important and more needs to be done along 14th to encourage restoration of facades that are derelict.

8. I moved to 14th because of the diversity of businesses along 14th, but this must be guided and the diversity continue to be encouraged. If not, we will end up a bunch of bars and night clubs and become Adams Morgan.

Questions to Franco:

Q: How does the DC market compare to other cities (New York, Chicago, and Atlanta) where you have stores?

A: Real estate taxes are higher in DC. DC has done some interesting things including TIFs downtown and “DC USA”, but nothing really focused on the small business and retailer. Other cities provide tax abatement for small retailers and businesses to help them stay healthy and avoid closing. DC should consider this.

Q: What can be done to encourage façade restoration on buildings that need it?

A: DC supposedly has a program to give grants to owners of buildings that need their façade repaired or restored, but they are very difficult to get. Too much paperwork.

Q: Is the business association on 14th Street helpful in getting the grants?

A. To some extent, but they need to do more outreach.

Second Speaker – Timothy Paul, owner of Timothy Paul Rugs and Timothy Paul Bedding, on different blocks of 14th Street

1. The momentum on block with the carpet store (the 1500 block of 14th Street), stalled in 2003. A lot of the holdouts on the block are buildings with derelict facades and whose owners are unwilling to put the resources to repair them. The city must force them to either repair the buildings or sell them. This is the number one thing that needs to be done to help 14th Street

2. New businesses will select better developed blocks when choosing a site. Therefore, a zoning approach that facilitates full development on every block and addresses derelict properties is critical to the success of 14th Street.

3. Aesthetics do matter to foot traffic, and he is at least considering the possibility of moving the rug store to a better-looking block in the future.

Giorgio Furioso mentioned that there is no critical assessment of the development needs along 14th Street including the empty lots and empty spaces between retail.

Andrea Doughty said that the point is that 14th Street has not developed uniformly and that the proposed zoning approach will allow highly localized zoning that is contextual.

David Franco pointed out that every block on 14th has issues.

Questions to Paul:

Q: Who do you view as your competition?

A: My stores are very different than the other stores here, so there's no real competition because our price points are so varied. But there is synergy having several stores that sell home furnishings along 14th Street. What is key is that all stores look good and are well maintained no matter the price point

Phyllis Klein said that she felt it was not so much a zoning issue as an enforcement issue with DCRA. She went on to say that if DCRA actually inspected and enforced, this would facilitate a lot of change and would address the façade issue.

Giorgio Furioso agreed and said that DCRA has failed the city. He said that it was ironic that we would let new businesses fail instead of bringing the old ones into compliance.

Ben Harris felt that we needed to assist older, out of compliance businesses by cleaning them up and repairing their facades instead of forcing them out of business.

Joe Kerger said that there are businesses and buildings along 14th Street that are menacing and cause problems.

Andrea Doughty said that the issue of façade repair and compliance should be raised on 7/21 when senior representatives from OP would be attending the meeting. Others at the meeting raised the idea of seeking grants from DDOT and HPRB to assist with the streetscape along 14th.

David Franco said that branding, façade restoration and cross walks were all important to keeping the momentum going along 14th Street and that it's helpful to have like businesses clustered together because the clusters attract browsers. He would prefer more clothing stores also. He said that he believes that Room and Board will be a huge help to the corridor and will give confidence to new or perspective retail that the area is improving.

Timothy Paul said that his customers always complain about the lack of parking. But David Franco believed that parking was not as critical a factor. Paul said that parking brings new customers into the neighborhood and suggested that parking meters that accept credit cards would be a big help. He also pointed out that the rug store is a destination.

David Franco mentioned a study that looked at the attributes of 16 successful retail areas in

major cities where parking was scarce. The findings were that parking was not that sought after because the customers expected the parking to be tight and took other transportation.

Andrea Doughty mentioned the idea of utilizing the downtown parking garages and encouraging the use of the circulator bus. She also suggested that the circulator bus branding should highlight the 14th Street shopping corridor.

David Franco said that he thinks zoning requirements, in particular for parking, inhibit development. He cited the need for more parking associated with office uses and said the parking requirements for all uses should be reexamined.

Andrea Doughty asked both speakers that if 14th Street were to be fully developed, what would they like to see happen. Andrea gave them choices of retail, restaurants/bars, residential, office or a mix of all. She pointed out that the current zoning regulations along 14th Street are heavily weighted towards residential. David Franco said that he would like to see a balanced mix of all of the uses and he would like to see the city relax the zoning requirements for offices so that more would come to 14th Street and increase daytime foot traffic. Timothy Paul agreed and wants to see more daytime foot traffic and wants to see the 1600 block of 14th Street, once it's completed a model for the development of the rest of the corridor.

Andrea Doughty asked if there was room on 14th Street for offices. Most agreed that there was and Giorgio Furioso said he believes that when office space is added to 14th Street, the residential space will become more valuable. David Franco said that 50% of inquiries into the space he is developing at 14th and Florida Ave (View 14) is for office use.

Mary Brown asked about the usefulness of the Arts Overlay district. Timothy Paul said that the overlay creates a creative synergy that is helpful to retail, and especially for his rug store. He sees overlapping customers with visual artists who have galleries here. David said the Arts District adds character, and should be part of the branding for the neighborhood. A discussion followed about affordable housing for artist and studio space and the Mathers Building was discussed.

Andrea Doughty asked about restaurant and bar uses versus other uses. David Franco said that restaurants, especially those with outdoor seating, were extremely important because they send the message that the area is safe. He was not so positive on bars. Another attendee said that clubs like the Black Cat are shuttered during the day and create dead zones for foot traffic and that he supported a limit on the linear street frontage on bars and restaurants. Giorgio Furioso pointed out that the same was true of Studio Theater. Another attendee agreed that restaurants with outdoor seating make things safer both during the day and night.

A discussion of crime followed and many lamented the lack of police foot patrols along 14th Street. Both David Franco and Timothy Paul felt that the area needs more police attention, based on issues they've seen. Retailers prefer bike/foot patrols. Also, David Franco said that in the past he has gotten little attention when he was had crime occur at the store, but his recent posting of the robbery at his store on YouTube has gotten a lot of police attention and ultimately arrests were made. Also, several attendees mentioned the increase in the homeless population along 14th Street since the spring.

Andrea Doughty asked what area in DC was 14th Street's greatest competition. David Franco said that he sees the area as very unique with small, non-national retail tenants. He felt that we should not try to compete with Georgetown or Chinatown but should work on our own branding. Timothy Paul felt that it is important to continue to develop 14th Street as a design destination. He said he is glad that Room and Board is coming to 14th Street and that zoning continues to be important.

Both Timothy Paul and David Franco felt that 14th Street zoning should begin at N Street and go up as far as V or W or even Florida. 14th Street was felt to be a different space (more boulevard-like, wide sidewalks) than U Streets (with narrower sidewalks and different building forms), which might warrant different zoning treatments for the two corridors. A meeting attendee said that he viewed U Street as basically a small Adams Morgan. Phyllis Klein mentioned that the 1300 block of U Street was fully saturated with bars but the 1400 and 1500 block were more similar to 14th.

The meeting adjourned at 8:30 pm