

TESTIMONY OF LEIGH CATHERINE MILES, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
TENLEYTOWN MAIN STREET
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
FEBRUARY 13, 2018

Good afternoon Chairman McDuffie and members of the Committee on Business and Economic Development. My name is Leigh Catherine Miles and I am the Executive Director of Tenleytown Main Street.

I am here today testifying in support of the Department of Small and Local Business Development. Tenleytown Main Street is privileged to work with the Neighborhood Revitalization division as both a DC Main Street program and managing organization for the Wisconsin Avenue Clean Team.

Tenleytown Main Street works directly with small business owners and local residents to sustain and grow the economic vitality of our business district. Our portfolio of programs, including marketing and special events, public and urban green space maintenance, small business consulting, and financial support for physical improvements to commercial buildings, are designed to meet the unique challenges of our community's businesses. Over the past two years, since launching the Main Street program, Tenleytown has developed into a cleaner, greener, and growing business district that attracts entrepreneurs and new investment.

Six days a week, the small but mighty Wisconsin Avenue Clean Team maintains sidewalks throughout the commercial corridor, removing on average 1,000 pounds of trash and recyclables each month. Previously neglected tree boxes now receive regular care, and Tenleytown Main Street partners with community groups, local schools, and residents to adopt sections of Wisconsin Avenue as a supplement to the Clean Team's efforts. And through our Fessenden Park working group, TMS has initiated a process to care for and activate an underutilized, poorly maintained urban park.

Tenleytown's storefronts are also looking better. In 2017, the Clean Team removed graffiti from 115 properties in the service area. Small grants from Tenleytown Main Street help offset the cost of new signs, awnings, and windows, with more than \$12,000 invested in modest but meaningful improvements to date. In 2018, we are piloting a façade renovation program that will fund more extensive exterior improvements for commercial buildings, nearly quadrupling our investment in storefront improvements.

Visible, tangible improvements like these have a ripple effect. Business owners – and residents – take greater pride in their Main Street. Customers want to spend more time, and money, in the business district. And demonstrated investments from TMS encourage businesses to partner with us on other initiatives. As but one example, last year Tenley WinterFest saw its highest level of participation in six years, with 37 businesses and 5 community groups taking part in the week-long event that attracted thousands to Tenleytown shops and restaurants.

A cleaner, greener, more engaging business district in turn has made our Main Street a more attractive place to open a new business. Since 2016, 15 new storefront businesses have opened in Tenleytown—and this does not include upper story businesses that have made our district home.

Next month we will cut the ribbon on a new 100-unit apartment building. The opening of the Frequency Apartments – only the second apartment building in our Main Street – will more than double the number of rental units available. Another mixed-use project is anticipated to begin construction later this year and will bring an additional 146 apartments and 11,000 ft² of retail to Tenleytown.

While new businesses and projects are one sign of a thriving business district, our Main Street is not just about celebrating the new. We are equally focused on ensuring continued success for businesses that have served our community for decades – some for more than 70 years. Last year we initiated a technical assistance program that offers free, customized, one-on-one expert assistance in challenging business areas. We're investing \$23,000 over two-years to help small business owners develop strategies and processes for overcoming the hurdles facing their businesses. As new businesses open and neighborhoods across the city boom, we are committed to helping our businesses keep pace and remain competitive.

New businesses, stronger established businesses, more attractive storefronts, cleaner and greener streets – the impact Tenleytown Main Street has achieved in the last two years is a testament to the dedicated community volunteers who support our work and to local business leaders who place confidence in us. It is also thanks to the Department of Small and Local Business Development, its former and current leadership under Director Whitfield, and the outstanding work of Lauren Adkins, Cristina Amoruso, and their colleagues. DSLBD provides the resources that enable Main Street programs to form, grow, and sustain. TMS is particularly grateful for the spirit of collaboration that DSLBD fosters among DC Main Streets so that ideas, lessons, and resources are shared across programs, as well as for the expertise and training they provide to tackle the challenges Main Streets, and those they serve, face.

I am grateful to this committee, as well as Ward 3 Councilmember Mary Cheh and Mayor Bowser, for your continued support of Tenleytown Main Street and Main Street programs across the District, and for the opportunity to testify today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.