

TESTIMONY OF LEIGH CATHERINE MILES, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
TENLEYTOWN MAIN STREET  
BEFORE THE  
COMMITTEE ON BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
FEBRUARY 13, 2019

Good morning 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 want to begin by thanking you for your continued support of the DC Main Streets program and the Department of Small and Local Business Development (DSLBD). As Executive Director of Tenleytown Main Street, it might seem obvious that I would be here speaking in support of DSLBD. However, I am also a long-time resident of the neighborhood our Main Street program serves, and I can attest firsthand the transformational impact this program has had on our business community.

Since Tenleytown Main Street opened its doors, Tenleytown has experienced growth not only in the number, but the diversity, of businesses that have chosen to open in the neighborhood. No longer can Tenleytown be known as the mattress store capital of the city. New businesses have included full-service and fast-casual restaurants, yoga studios and bike shops, education and healthcare, and home goods stores.

In the past three years, 20 storefront businesses have opened, in addition to many upper-level businesses, and the number of available apartment units has more than doubled. This spring, we will welcome an innovative co-working space, Two Birds, that offers not only workspace and resources for entrepreneurs, but also licensed childcare that will enable working parents to grow their businesses. It's just one of several new businesses in the pipeline.

Over the next two years, we anticipate two mixed-use developments that will add 180 rental units and 16,000 sf of retail, transforming two long vacant commercial properties.

As new businesses open, long-standing businesses continue to thrive. Last year, Middle C Music, David Zahirpour Oriental Rugs, Framer's Workroom, National Diving Center, and American Valet, to name just a few, celebrated 16, 35, 37, 45, and 77 years respectively in business. And all are direct beneficiaries of TMS programs.

Tenleytown Main Street works with new businesses before they open, setting them up for success, and provides support to all businesses throughout their lifecycle. From building partnerships among local businesses to marketing assistance to funding storefront upgrades to helping them navigate District agencies, our goal is to help all our businesses become legacy businesses.

Our programs are grounded in both the time-tested Main Street approach, as well as a unique understanding of our local market. Our 2018 biennial survey, combined with prior market analysis completed in 2016, showed that investments in physical improvements and marketing would have the greatest impact on improving the health of our business district.

TMS responded with marketing campaigns, such as last Valentine's Day's #LoveTenley campaign and the current 'Tenley Tuesday' promotion aimed at our extensive educational community, which collectively have reached more than 100,000 potential customers.

Special events like Art All Night and Tenley WinterFest reinforce Tenleytown's creative, family-friendly brand and bring 16,000 visitors – and their dollars – to the business district annually. Eighty percent of businesses surveyed say that events like these boost the brand reputation of their specific business and the larger Tenleytown business district.

The DC Main Streets grant has also enabled TMS to invest in storefront improvements and façade upgrades. Last year, 27% of grant funds went to physical improvements for local businesses, and this year we will allocate nearly a third of grant funding to exterior upgrades. As the majority of customers take less than five seconds to decide whether to enter a business, these improvements can have a big impact on a store's bottom line. As the owner of the National Diving Center, which received façade funding in 2018, said: "This program not only helps us attract new customers but also gives our new customers ... something to be proud of."

Other investments in the physical infrastructure of the Main Street include: a multi-year initiative to transform a century-old neglected park on Wisconsin Avenue and partnerships with American University and the University of Maryland to generate innovative design ideas to better activate public space around the central Metro plaza.

And I would be remiss if I did not mention the Wisconsin Avenue Clean Team at this point. The team, comprised of two full-time and one part-time crew members, does an outsized job in keeping our sidewalks clean and accessible. Covering 2.2 miles of Wisconsin Avenue, six days a week, the team annually removes more than five tons of litter, cleans graffiti from 100 properties, and tends nearly 340 street trees.

In combination, Clean Team and DC Main Street funding through the Department of Small and Local Business Development have enabled Tenleytown Main Street to make major strides in improving how customers view and engage with our business district, benefiting more than 150 local businesses. And in turn, how entrepreneurs evaluate the economic opportunity of opening a business in Tenleytown.

I am extremely grateful to Director Kristi Whitfield and her staff, including Lauren Adkins, Cristina Amoruso, and Jennifer Prats, who unflaggingly champion small businesses, actively support collaboration across our communities, and lend their decades of expertise to the work of Main Street programs like ours.

I am also grateful to Chairman McDuffie and the members of this committee for your investments in small and local businesses and in historic business communities like Tenleytown that need those investments to keep pace with growth across the city.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.