

Applicant Testimony at June 26, 2024 Planning Commission Meeting

Thank you for this opportunity to share the vision for Abrazo Dancehall and its impact on our community.

There is an important note I would like to share. I've been a tango dancer for over 10 years. I met my husband and my closest friends in tango. When I have the opportunity, I'd head to dance at milongas in Eastern Market, Bethesda, Arlington, and DC. A milonga is a tango social dance event that is shaped by the customs and traditions developed over 100 years in Buenos Aires. We dance in public libraries, dance studios, embassies, and even the Sunrise Senior Living's community room. Before dancing though, we share meals with friends nearby, then we dance, and sometimes even top the evening off with a late-night snack at a bar nearby. These nights aren't just about the dance; they were about connecting, they were about rejuvenating, and growing together.

Argentine Tango is often seen as a performance art, when you think of tango you probably imagine a steamy dance with a rose between the teeth. That is what we call stage tango. Argentine tango as a social dance is so much more. It's a fully improvised social dance that fosters mindfulness, skill, and lifelong relationships. Abrazo Dancehall will bring this enriching experience to Vienna, and create a cultural space where our community can come together.

Vienna's Comprehensive Plan emphasizes promoting local tourism and enhancing arts and culture. Abrazo Dancehall aligns perfectly with this vision. In addition to growing a local community, we will attract dancers from neighboring areas, and will drive economic activity to our local businesses. Tango dancers even travel internationally just to dance. In just a week's time, over 150 friends from around the globe are traveling in to dance at our friends' weekend event happening, just 6 miles away, at Colvin Run Dance Hall in Tysons. Those dancers will be here, dancing for 5 days straight, and will need places to eat, sleep, and to shop. Now this isn't our milonga, and its not happening at our studio, but it is a clear example of how this could enrich Vienna. This is about making Vienna a cultural and economic hub.

Having been in business in Vienna for 5 years, our existing portrait studio already contributes to arts and culture in Vienna. Expanding to include a dancehall as an accessory use will further this mission. What I think is vital to understand is that we expect very modest revenue from the dancehall, and what revenue is

generated at milongas will mostly just cover expenses and go to support the Vienna Public Art Foundation. We are asking for this conditional use for the love of tango and to grow community, not with an eye for profit.

Third spaces, or spaces built to foster community and connection, are shrinking. Scientists say loneliness is on the rise. Abrazo Dancehall will be a sanctuary for social interaction, personal growth, and cultural engagement.

I am happy to talk about the logistics of parking, noise control, and answer your questions. I ask for your recommendation to the Board of Zoning Appeals, not for financial gain, but for the love of tango and the betterment of our community. Thank you.